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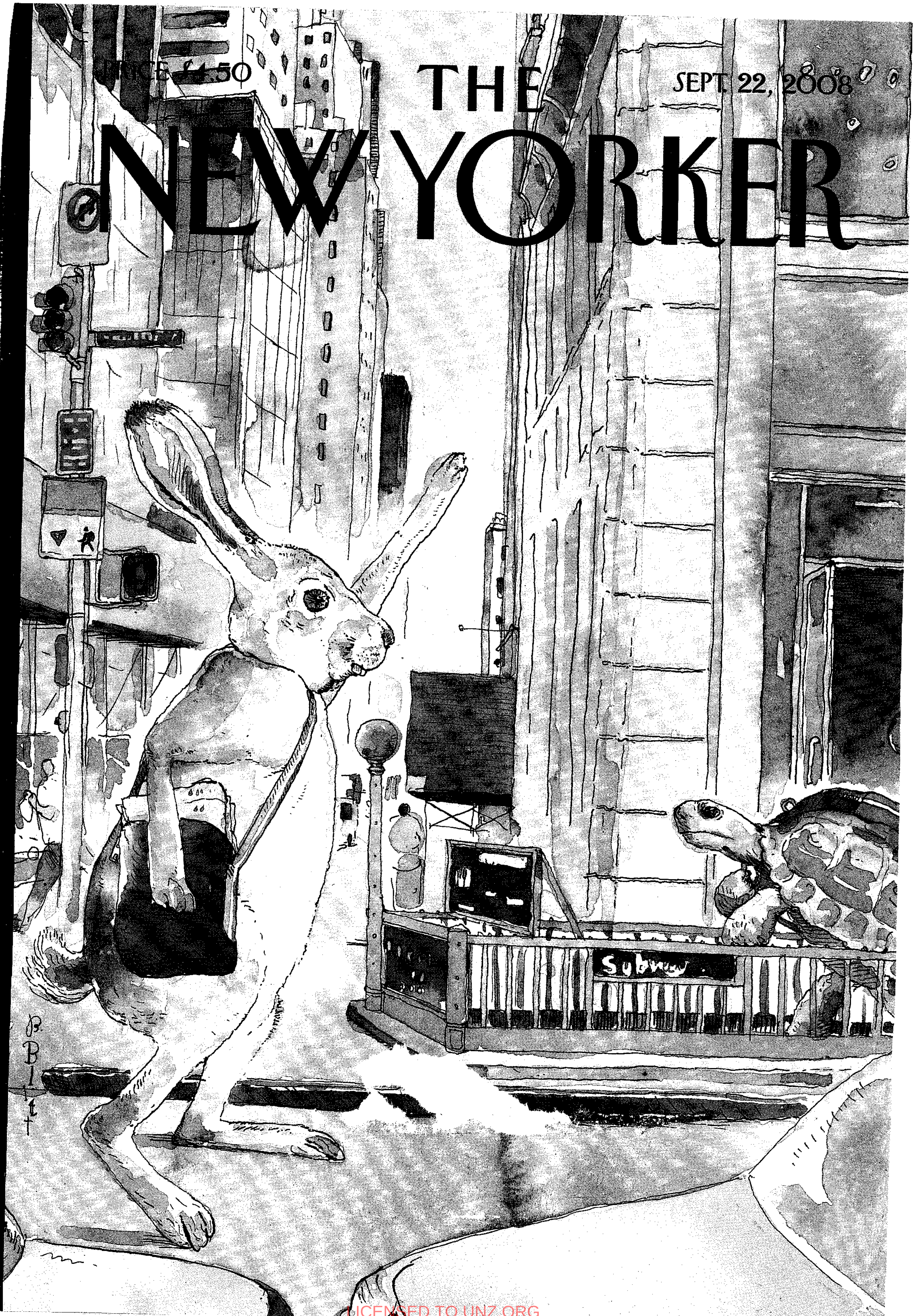
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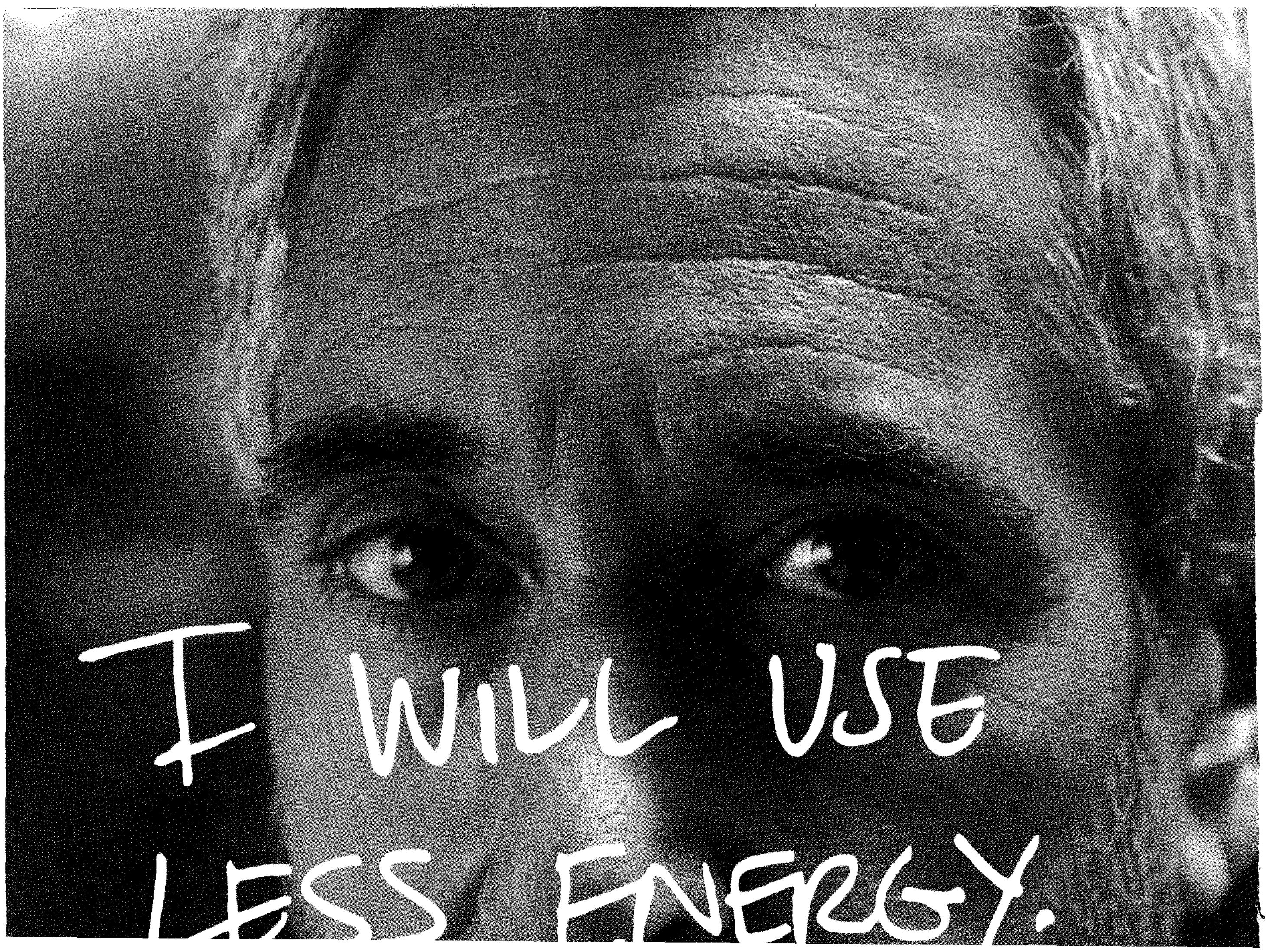
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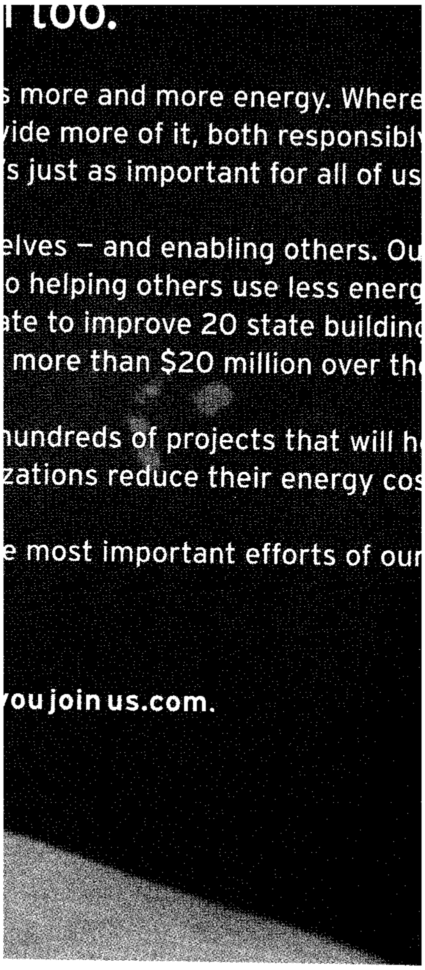

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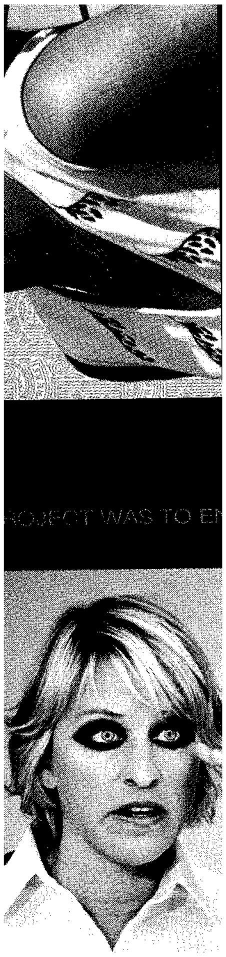

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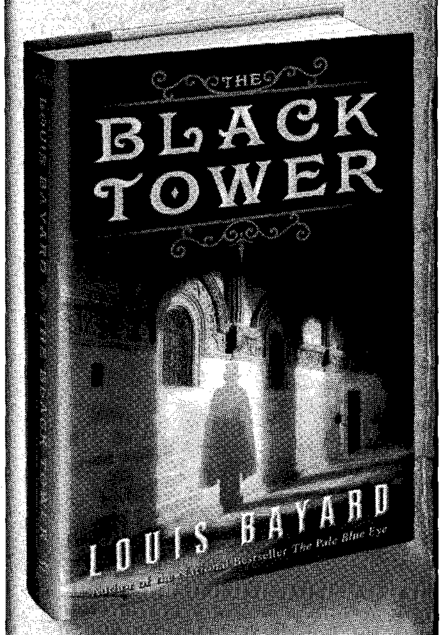

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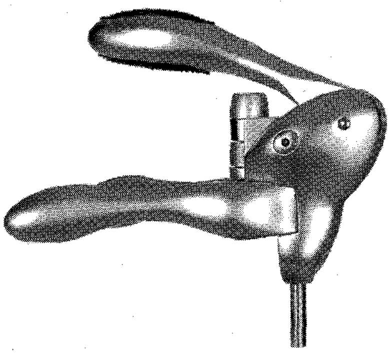

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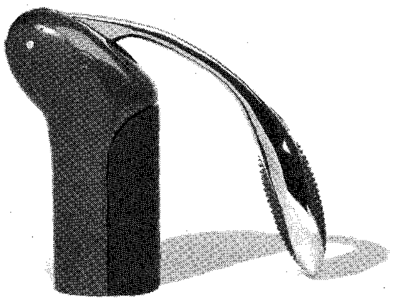

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CONTRIBUTORS

Steve Coll (Comment, p. 31) is the president of the New America Foundation. His books include "Ghost Wars," for which he won a Pulitzer Prize, and "The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century."

Adam Gopnik ("Freeing the Elephants," p. 46) has been writing for the magazine since 1986. His new book, "Angels and Ages," will be published in January.

John Seabrook (The Talk of the Town, p. 34) is a staff writer. His book "Flash of Genius: And Other True Stories of Invention" has just been published.

Marilyn Hacker (Poem, p. 40) has published twelve books of poems, including "Desesperanto."

George Saunders (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 44) teaches at Syracuse University. He is the author of "The Braindead Megaphone," a collection of essays.

John Colapinto ("Outside Man," p. 52) is a staff writer and the author of "As Nature Made Him" and "About the Author."

Barry Blitt (Cover; Illustration, p. 65) is working on illustrations for a children's book, "What's the Weather Inside?"

Philip Gourevitch ("The State of Sarah Palin," p. 64), the editor of *The Paris Review*, is the author of, most recently, "Standard Operating Procedure," a collaboration with Errol Morris, which was published in May.

Bob Dylan (Poems, p. 68) is the author of "Hollywood Foto-Rhetoric: The Lost Manuscript," with photographs by Barry Feinstein, which is due out in November. "Tell Tale Signs: The Bootleg Series Vol. 8" will be released next month.

Aleksandar Hemon (Fiction, p. 76) published his second novel, "The Lazarus Project," in May.

Jill Lepore (Books, p. 86), a professor of history at Harvard, will publish "Blindspot," her first novel, written with Jane Kamensky, in December.

Hilton Als (The Theatre, p. 94) is the Joan Leiman Jacobson Visiting Nonfiction Writer in English and American Studies at Smith College.

Mark Ulriksen (Illustration, p. 74), a regular contributor of cover art and illustrations, is currently showing his work in a group exhibition at the San Francisco Convention and Visitors' Bureau.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Ask the Author: *Philip Gourevitch* takes questions about Sarah Palin and Alaska. / Audio: *Ryan Lizza* and *Hendrik Hertzberg* on the Campaign Trail, with *Dorothy Wickenden*. / *Adam Gopnik* talks about Babar, plus art by Jean de Brunhoff. / *Tobias Wolff* reads a story by *Stephanie Vaughn*. / Video: *Steve Brodner* sketches the Vice-Presidential nominees. / Blogs: *Steve Coll* on Osama bin Laden's trust fund, *Dana Goodyear* in Tokyo, *Sasha Frere-Jones* on Flying Lotus, and daily updates to the Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, and Goings On. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.

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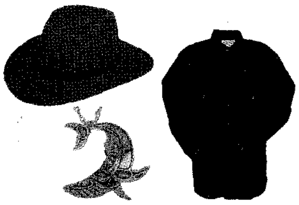

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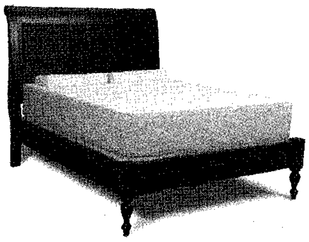

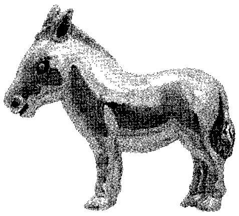

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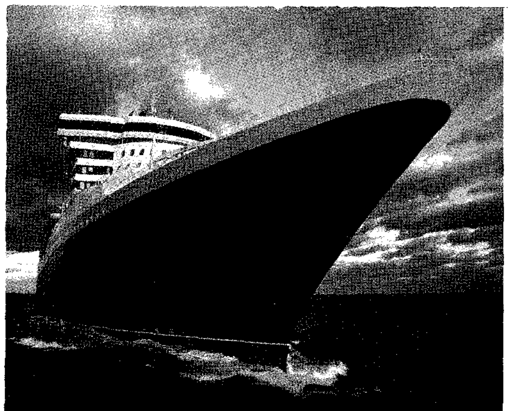

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THE MAIL

ON IRAQ

Steve Coll lets General David Petraeus off too easily on his improper involvement in partisan politics ("The General's Dilemma," September 8th). Petraeus justified his writing a misleading op-ed on progress in Iraq in the Washington *Post*, on September 26, 2004, a few weeks before the Presidential election, by telling Coll that he has long been a published writer. When I criticized this article, in an op-ed in May of 2007, Petraeus's public-affairs officer claimed that "over the times he has been in Iraq, he has written op-eds on various topics in order to provide context to what is happening on the ground." But Ilan Goldenberg, of the National Security Network, searched two hundred newspapers and could not find another op-ed that Petraeus had written in the previous five years. Furthermore, in August of 2005, as the situation in Iraq continued to deteriorate, Petraeus volunteered to brief three retired generals, who were to appear on "Meet the Press." These kinds of private briefings would help reinforce the Administration's talking points that we were winning in Iraq and that the training of Iraqi forces was going so well that the United States could begin a drawdown within a year. Coll may argue that this type of behavior reflects Petraeus's ambitions, but this type of ambition crosses the line of what military professionals should do.

Lawrence Korb
Senior Fellow
Center for American Progress
Washington, D.C.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Reading Nick Paumgarten's article on Greenwich, Connecticut, I couldn't help remembering the days I lived there, in a tiny studio apartment in a run-down Victorian house, a stroll away from Greenwich Avenue, where Woolworth's still cooked the best hamburger in town ("A Greenwich of the Mind," August 25th). For three hundred and sixty dollars a month, I had a deck, a fireplace, and original red-and-green stained-glass windows. I stuffed my bed in a closet so that I could have a living room during the day, and the best clothes I've ever owned came from the Greenwich Hospital Auxiliary Thrift Shop. It all seems a long time ago, but this was in the early nineteen-eighties. Back in town for a visit a few years ago, I went searching for a little of that old life and stopped in at the thrift shop. There was a sale that day, and I was thrilled to find a rug for half the twenty-five-dollar price tag. I eagerly handed over a twenty-dollar bill. The woman behind the counter shot me a look of such withering contempt that she could have patented it. "The rug," she hissed, "was twenty-five *hundred* dollars. It is now twelve hundred and fifty dollars, and you are twelve hundred and thirty short."

Anne Longley
Oxford, Conn.

IMAGES OF THE GAMES

The unlabored erudition of Anthony Lane makes him the closest thing that our culture has to a working man of letters, and his insight about the Beijing Olympics that "the one aspect of victory that Plato could not have foreseen is the television camera" has even more implications than the one he sets forth ("Fun and Games," September 1st). As a film critic, Lane understands the temptation of the cave far better than most; if Plato did not foretell the clarity by which the camera separated the individual from the masses, as Lane writes, the philosopher did predict the distracting and illusory allure of that manufactured image in the Republic, both in Book VII's Allegory of the Cave and in Book X's indictment of the painted image.

Cheryl Foster
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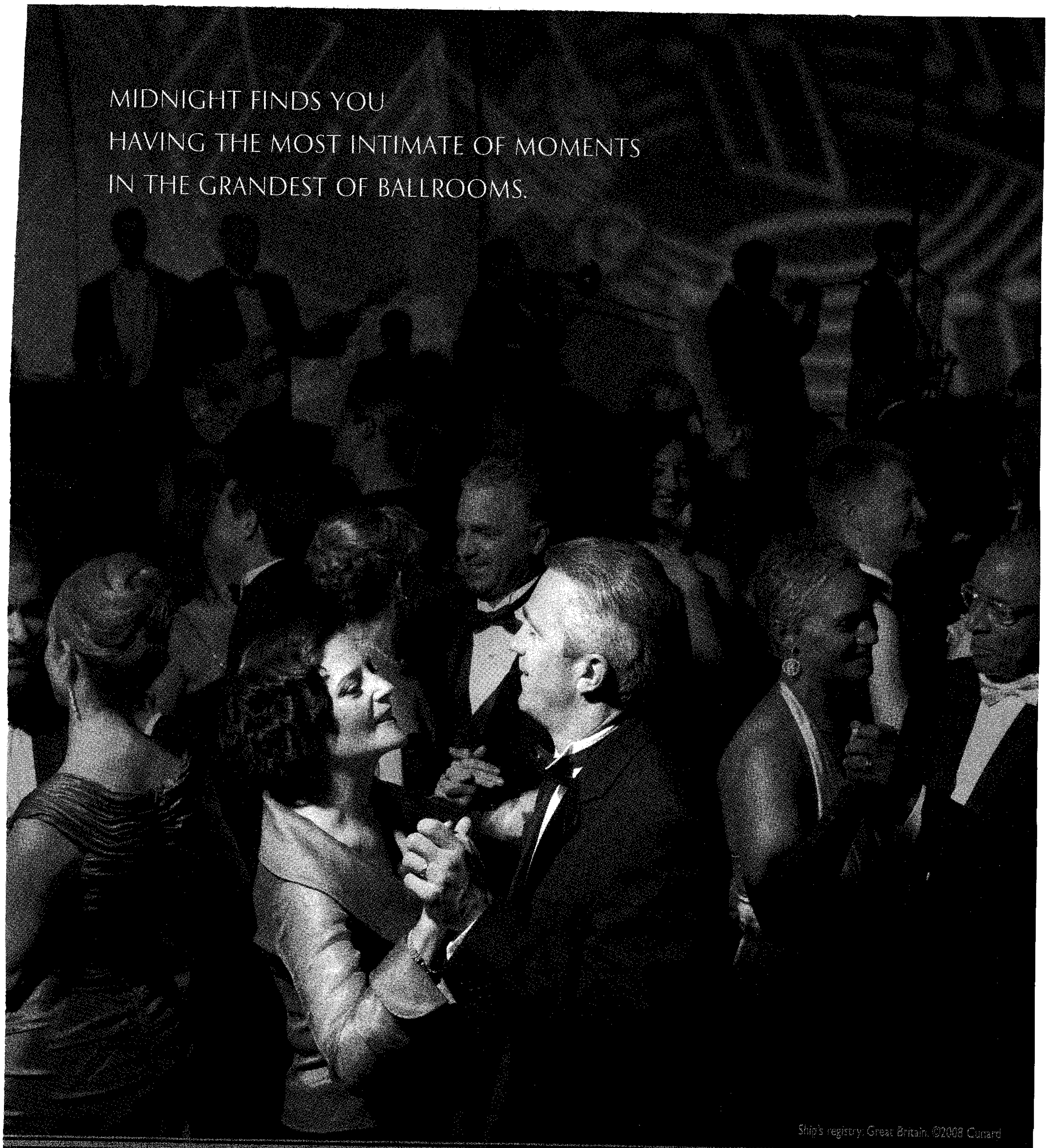
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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21	22	23	17	18	19	20

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
GIRL NEXT DOOR

Katie Holmes has her Broadway début, in Arthur Miller's "All My Sons," alongside John Lithgow, Dianne Wiest, and Patrick Wilson. The Second World War drama, from 1947, centers on the Keller family, whose son, a pilot, is missing. Simon McBurney directs. (See page 12.)

NIGHT LIFE
NEWMAN'S OWN

For the past decade or so, the peerlessly satiric singer and songwriter Randy Newman has plied his trade mostly in Hollywood, scoring films. He recently released "Harps and Angels," his first studio album in nine years, which finds him musing on the state of the nation and romance, among other topics. He has the stage at Carnegie Hall all to himself this week. (See page 14.)

ART
BIBLICAL PROPORTION

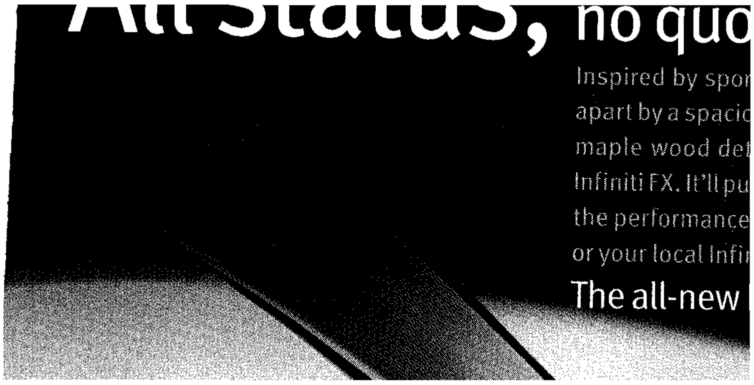
In "The Dead Sea Scrolls: Mysteries of the Ancient World," the Jewish Museum exhibits fragments of six of the some nine hundred scrolls that have been unearthed in caves in the Judean Desert since 1947. None of these have been previously seen in New York, and three are being exhibited for the first time anywhere. (See page 17.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
AMERICAN WAY

Philippe Quint is an unusual case: a charismatic Russian-born violinist who has become a devoted champion of American contemporary music, as well as an American citizen. Quint's concert at Weill Recital Hall includes unaccompanied works by Virgil Thomson, John Corigliano, and Bach (the Chaconne). (See page 23.)

MOVIES
FRENCH FOR "ZELIG"

The critic, publicist, director, scout, and festival official Pierre Rissient has been making things happen in movies since the nineteen-fifties. In conjunction with screenings of Todd McCarthy's filmed portrait of Rissient, "Man of Cinema," MOMA will be showing movies he's championed or worked on, including Clint Eastwood's "Bird" and Jane Campion's "The Piano." (See page 27.)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THE THEATRE
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ALIENS WITH EXTRAORDINARY SKILLS
Women's Project presents Saviana Stanescu's dark comedy about a Moldavian clown trying to obtain an American work visa. Tea Alagic directs. Previews begin Sept. 22. (424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

ALL MY SONS
John Lithgow, Dianne Wiest, Patrick Wilson, and Katie Holmes star in Arthur Miller's play from 1947, about a businessman's shady dealings during the Second World War. Simon McBurney directs. Previews begin Sept. 18. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE ENGLISH CHANNEL
At the Abingdon, a play by Robert Brustein, which explores the possibility that Shakespeare borrowed from his contemporaries Christopher Marlowe and the Earl of Southampton. Daniela Varon directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 21. (312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

EQUUS
Daniel Radcliffe, Richard Griffiths, and Kate Mulgrew star in Peter Shaffer's 1974 drama, about a disturbed teen-ager and his psychiatrist. Thea Sharrock directs. In previews. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

FIFTY WORDS
Michael Weller wrote this play, starring Elizabeth Marvel and Norbert Leo Butz, about a crazy night in the life of a young Brooklyn family. Austin Pendleton directs the MCC Theatre production. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

THE GLASS CAGE
The Mint presents the U.S. première of J. B. Priestley's drama, about a family whose youngest son brings his Native American wife and her siblings home for a visit. Lou Jacob directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 21. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

IN CONFLICT
Douglas C. Wager adapted Yvonne Latty's book, a compendium of the views of a cross-section of Iraq-war veterans. Previews begin Sept. 18. (Culture Project, 27 Barrow St. 212-352-3101.)

IRENA'S VOW
Tovah Feldshuh stars in a new play by Dan Gordon, based on the true story of a woman who worked as head housekeeper for a German officer in Occupied Poland during the Second World War and went on to shelter Jewish refugees. In previews. Opens Sept. 22. (Baruch Performing Arts Center, E. 25th St. between Lexington and Third Aves. 212-352-3101.)

KIOSK
The ARICA Performance Company presents a conceptual one-woman show, about a clerk at a train-station kiosk. Sept. 18-20. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-832-1155.)

LILLI MARLENE
Kathryn Ryan wrote the book for this new musical featuring songs from the Second World War era, about the friendship of three women living in Berlin, London, and Indiana. Erv Raible directs. Previews begin Sept. 18. Opens Sept. 22. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS
Frank Langella stars in Robert Bolt's 1961 account of Sir Thomas More, who voiced his objections to King Henry VIII when he left the Catholic Church. Doug Hughes directs the Roundabout Theatre Company production. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

THE SEAGULL
Kristin Scott Thomas, Peter Sarsgaard, Mackenzie Crook (from the British version of "The Office"), and Zoe Kazan star in Chekhov's play, in a translation by Christopher Hampton. Ian Rickson directs the Royal Court Theatre production. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

TABOOS
Carl Djerassi wrote this drama, about two couples—one a pair of lesbians, the other fundamentalist Christians—trying to have a child. Melissa Maxwell directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 19. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

A TALE OF TWO CITIES
Jill Santoriello wrote the book, music, and lyrics for this musical adaptation of the Dickens novel. Warren Carlyle directs and choreographs. In previews. Opens Sept. 18. (Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE TEMPEST
Mandy Patinkin stars in the Shakespeare comedy at Classic Stage Company. Brian Kulick directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 18. (136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

13, A NEW MUSICAL
Jason Robert Brown ("Parade") wrote the music and lyrics and Dan Elish and Robert Horn wrote the book for this musical, about a New York City teen-ager who is forced to move to Indiana with his newly divorced mother. Jeremy Sams directs. In previews. (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TO BE OR NOT TO BE
Nick Whitby wrote this play, based on the film of the same name, a black comedy set in Warsaw in 1939, about a theatre troupe that becomes involved in spy games during the war. Casey Nicholaw directs. The Manhattan Theatre Club pro-

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duction stars David Rasche, Peter Maloney, and Jan Maxwell. In previews. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

WIG OUT!
Erik King stars in Tarell Alvin McCraney's new play, in which two drag-queen houses duke it out. In previews. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

NOW PLAYING

ANGER/NATION
The Kitchen premières a new play by Radiohole, about the nineteenth-century temperance advocate Carry A. Nation. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

ENTER LAUGHING
The York Theatre Company's amiable revival of Joseph Stein's 1976 musical, "So Long, 174th Street," feels familiar whether you've seen any of its previous incarnations or not. Based on a semiautobiographical novel by Carl Reiner, set in the thirties, about David Kolowitz, an eager, awkward kid from the Bronx (Josh Grisetti) who doesn't let his lack of talent stop him from trying to become a Broadway star or from lusting after beautiful women, it's got catchy songs (by Stan Daniels), a capable cast, big laughs, and more gags about Dolores del Rio and the ha-cha-cha than seem reasonable in any era. Michael Tucker and Jill Eikenberry play David's parents, who have dreams of his becoming a pharmacist. Stuart Ross directs. (St. Peter's Theatre, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820.)

KING OF SHADOWS
Working Theatre presents the world première of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's new play, about Jessica (Kat Foster), a well-intended but naïve graduate student who takes in a gay runaway, Nihar (Satya Bhabha), who may or may not be on the run from demons from another universe. The supernatural, the nature of evil, and societal pressures (or lack thereof) on homosexual youth are familiar themes in Aguirre-Sacasa's work, but here the treatment suffers from an excessively melodramatic talkiness and a preference for familiar facts and figures over plot and character development. As a result, the acting is overly earnest almost to the point of insincerity, and the attempt to end on a note of ambiguity falls flat. Connie Grappo directs. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave. 212-868-4444.)

LADY
Kenny (Michael Shannon) has learned some of life's most profound lessons from his dog, Lady, and now she's lost in the dark morning woods at the peak of hunting season. In Craig Wright's funny, smart, and sometimes heart-wrenching play, Kenny's childhood friend Dyson (Paul Sparks) is a philandering college professor who is angry with a third childhood friend, Graham (David Wilson Barnes), a Republican congressman, for somehow inspiring Dyson's only son to join the Marines. At its weakest points, "Lady" loses its way in rants about politics and the Iraq war. But these shortcomings are made up for by Michael Shannon's near-perfect performance as Kenny, a film junkie perpetually stoned on his dying wife's medical weed; however numb and apolitical he may be, Kenny's greatest wish is to be good, his unwavering ally is his sense of humor, and his rare gift is his ability to love deeply without conditions. Directed by Dexter Bullard. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

THE QUARREL
When a Hasidic rabbi named Hersh (Reuven Russell) spots his childhood friend Chaim (Sam Guncler) in Montreal in 1948, he looks for a moment as though he's seeing a ghost. The conversation between two Holocaust survivors from Bialystok that ensues is more theological argument than conventional drama, but the actors carry us through the play's prolix first half and into its heart: a confrontation between two men who have brushed aside the wings of death, retaining their individuality and their rage. Although the show's creators, David Brandes and Joseph Telushkin, are not natural playwrights, their characters have a conviction that emerges laterally, aided by the humanity of both performers. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

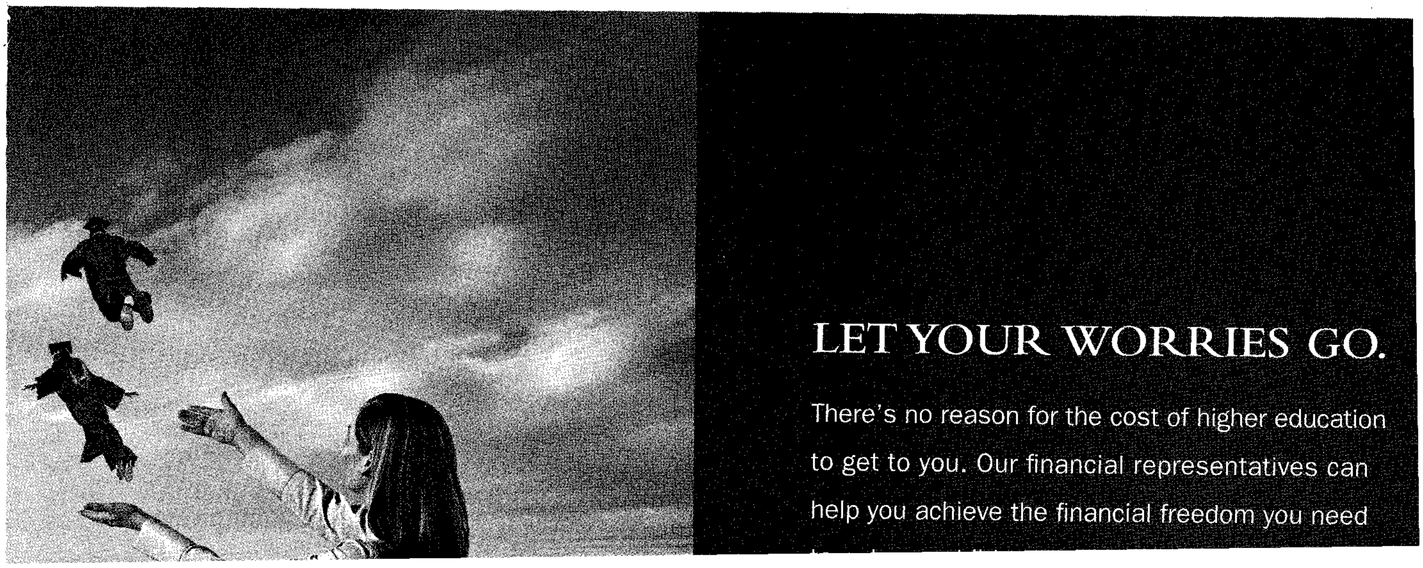
SOUTHERN PROMISES
Thomas Bradshaw's new drama, at P.S. 122. (Reviewed in this issue.) (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101.)

THREE CHANGES
Playwrights Horizons kicks off its season with the world première of a play by Nicky Silver, about an Upper West Side couple who get a visit from the husband's Hollywood-based brother. Wilson Milam directs. Starring Aya Cash, Scott Cohen, Dylan McDermott, Brian J. Smith, and Maura Tierney. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

WHAT'S THAT SMELL:
THE MUSIC OF JACOB STERLING
The world première of a comedy written and performed by David Pittu ("Is He Dead?"), a satire about a musical-theatre composer, with music by Randy Redd. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

Also Playing

ABSINTHE: Spiegeltent, South Street Seaport, Pier 17. 212-279-4200. **AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden,



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252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **FELA!:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-560-8912. Through Sept. 21. **THE FIRST BREEZE OF SUMMER:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **[TITLE OF SHOW]:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

A 1966 photograph of the innovative post-bop trumpeter Woody Shaw (1944-1989), who will be celebrated next week during the Festival of New Trumpet Music.

COURTESY FRANCIS WOLFF

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Sept. 22: The reggae founders **Toots and the Maytals.** Sept. 23: The legendary traditional-gospel group **Blind Boys of Alabama** travelled to the Big Easy to record their latest album, "Down in New Orleans." They spent time in the studio with members of the upper echelons of that musically rich city, including the **Preservation Hall Jazz Band,** and now the two groups are on the road together.

CARNEGIE HALL
57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—Sept. 19: **Randy Newman.** The generation or two who only know the pianist, singer, and songwriter Newman as the avuncular, nonthreatening singer-composer of the themes from "Toy Story" and "Monsters, Inc." are invited to get a dose of the real thing: Newman will be performing material from "Harps and Angels," his first new studio album in nearly a decade. It's a welcome, witty throwback to the days when his songs were snide, ironic, edgy, controversial, and, oh yeah, really funny.

JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH
55 Washington Sq. S. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 22-23 and Sept. 25-26: **Steve Earle,** the Michael Moore of alternative country, wraps up his summer tour of North America. He'll be joined by his wife, the country singer **Allison Moorer,** and he'll be performing songs from his latest album, "Washington Square Serenade." It's an acclaimed song cycle about his love of New York City, his home for the past three years.

"LET'S ZYDECO"
Sept. 21: **T Broussard & the Zydeco Steppers,** from Jennings, Louisiana, serve up a night of top-shelf dance music. (Connolly's, 121 W. 45th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597 or visit www.letszydeco.com.)

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Sept. 20: The **Feelies** are a low-key but seminal alternative band whose frenetic, jangle-heavy guitars, jittery rhythms, and unabashedly geeky aesthetic inspired a generation of acolytes, from Yo La Tengo and Luna to Weezer and beyond. This show comes hot on the heels of their first proper reunion show, this past July.

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—Sept. 20: The Beatles cover band the **Fab Faux,** which includes Will Lee, of the "Late Show with David Letterman," and Jimmy Vivino, of "Late Night with Conan O'Brien," may be working decades after the Beatles recorded, but they are soon to outlast the group itself. This is the Fab Faux's tenth anniversary, and they're celebrating in style by filling this Art Deco landmark with the psychedelic sounds of the second half of the sixties.

ROSELAND
239 W. 52nd St. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 22-23: The high-volume live shows of **My Bloody Valentine** are the stuff of rock-geek legend. The enigmatic Irish foursome were an avatar of shoegazer rock when they started out, in the late eighties, but they transformed themselves with their 1991 album, "Loveless." A collection of sensory-engulfing guitar pop, it was a dizzying achievement. Following its release, the band slipped from view, with rumors about the fastidiousness of the eccentric bandleader, Kevin Shields, conjuring comparisons to the Beach Boys' Brian Wilson.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Sept. 19-20: The fifth annual **Brooklyn Country Music Festival** turns this Park Slope rock club into a roadside honky-tonk. The headliners on the first night are **Andy Friedman** and the **Other Failures.** Friedman, a cartoonist and illustrator (and contributor to this magazine), sings hard-tack country originals that bear the lyrical stamp of a true artist. With the rollicking sounds of the **Flanks** and other acts. The following night **Alex Battles** and his band the Whisky Rebellion and **Jack Grace,** the Martini Cowboy, take over.

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Sept. 17: In the nineties, the **Dandy Warhols** carved out a respectable niche for themselves by combining the hazy drone of the Velvet Underground with the shiny hooks of eighties alternative pop. They had a clutch of minor hits and a star-making turn in Ondi Timoner's award-winning documentary, "DiG!," and are currently promoting their sixth studio album, "Earth to the Dandy Warhols." Sept. 18: Glasgow's **Mogwai,** known for frequently volatile, often inaccessible post-rock, has never trod the easy path. Its glacial, instrumental soundscapes can be simultaneously brutal and beautiful. The band is currently touring to promote its latest release, "The Hawk Is Howling." There will be no sing-alongs.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Sept. 23: The **Kings of Leon** have liberated hard-driving Southern rock from the likes of Molly Hatchet et al. They emerged from Nashville at the start of the decade with a confident swagger that garnered comparisons to the New York City neo-garage rockers the Strokes. Unlike our home-town heroes, the Kings have evolved. They're now an endearingly multifaceted and adventurous ensemble. Their fellow-Southerners the **Whigs** open the show.

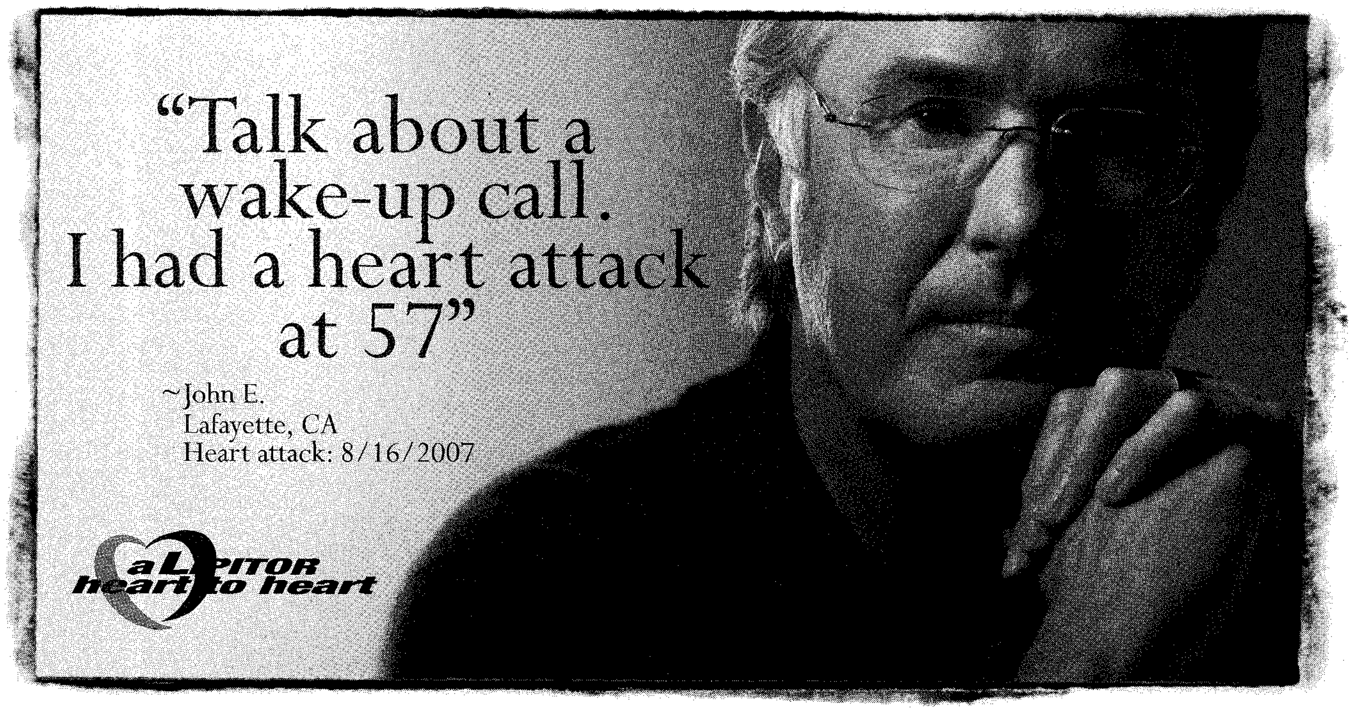
WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Sept. 19: The Congolese singer **Kanda Bongo Man** and his high-octane soukous kick off the W.M.I.'s fall season. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Half a century of performing can rob the staunchest singers of their vocal powers, but time has yet to catch up with **Jack Jones,** who first charted in 1962 with "Lollipops and Roses," and who may forever be linked in the pop-culture world to the theme to the "The Love Boat" (he sang the original version). He's in the Oak Room through Sept. 20, celebrating fifty years in the business, still flaunting the swagger that animated his 1964 hit "Wives and Lovers."

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Sept. 16-20: In the early seventies when fusion reigned, the acoustic ensemble **Oregon** looked abroad for inspiration. Three decades later, these world-music pioneers still benefit from the gleaming guitar work of their co-founder **Ralph Towner.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Sept. 16-21: At its best, the **Ron Carter** trio, which features the bassist along with the guitarist Rus-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LIPITOR is not for everyone. It is not for those with liver problems. And it is not for women who are nursing, pregnant or may become pregnant. If you take LIPITOR, tell your doctor if you feel any new muscle pain or weakness. This could be a sign of rare but serious muscle side effects. Tell your doctor about all medications you take. This may help avoid serious drug interactions. Your doctor should do blood tests to check your liver function before and during treatment and may adjust your dose. The most common side effects are gas, constipation, stomach pain and heartburn. They tend to be mild and often go away.

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- People with liver problems
- People allergic to anything in LIPITOR

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- If you have a thyroid problem

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LIPITOR can lower the risk of heart attack or stroke in patients who have risk factors for heart disease such as:

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POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF LIPITOR

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- **Muscle problems** that can lead to kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your chance for muscle problems is higher if you take certain other medicines with LIPITOR.
- **Liver problems**. Your doctor may do blood tests to check your liver before you start LIPITOR and while you are taking it.

Symptoms of muscle or liver problems include:

- Unexplained muscle weakness or pain, especially if you have a fever or feel very tired
- Nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain
- Brown or dark-colored urine
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow

If you have these symptoms, call your doctor right away.

The most common side effects of LIPITOR are:

- Headache
- Diarrhea, gas
- Rash
- Constipation
- Upset stomach and stomach pain
- Muscle and joint pain

Side effects are usually mild and may go away by themselves. Fewer than 3 people out of 100 stopped taking LIPITOR because of side effects.

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- Take LIPITOR at any time of day, with or without food.
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Don't:

- Do not change or stop your dose before talking to your doctor.
- Do not start new medicines before talking to your doctor.
- Do not give your LIPITOR to other people. It may harm them even if your problems are the same.
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sell Malone and the pianist **Mulgrew Miller,** calls to mind the quiet lyricism and formal elegance of the late, lamented Modern Jazz Quartet.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through Nov. 1: The talented and genial guitarist and singer **John Pizzarelli** shares the stage with his wife, **Jessica Molaskey,** an engaging vocalist and witty foil.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—The 4th Annual Diet Coke Women in Jazz Festival continues with a run of vocalists. **Gloria Lynne** and her quintet have the stage Sept. 17-21. The following evening belongs to **Pamela Luss,** who will be joined by the saxophonist **Houston Person** and others. Later that night, **Linda Ciofalo** takes over. **Robin McKelle** follows on Sept. 23.

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through Sept. 20: **Ashford & Simpson.** Great songwriters don't always make great performers, but Nickolas Ashford and Valerie Simpson do. When the hit-making duo is in full swing, they can convert this tony supper club into a downtown annex of the Apollo.

FESTIVAL OF NEW TRUMPET MUSIC
The annual gathering of horn players is under way. Sept. 17: **Avishai Cohen's Triveni** finds the Israeli trumpeter putting the bassist **Omer Avital** and the drummer **Nasheet Waits** through their paces at (Le) Poisson Rouge. Sept. 19: The **John McNeil/Bill McHenry Quartet** caps a night of underground sounds at the Cornelia Street Café. Sept. 21: Solo performances by **Frank London, Pam Fleming,** and others (Eldridge Street Synagogue). (For more information, visit www.fontmusic.org. Through Sept. 28.)

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—This week, the club features a tribute to Bud Powell, the visionary who fully translated the language of bebop to the piano. It features three pianists and their trios—**Geri Allen** (Sept. 18), **Uri Caine** (Sept. 19), and **Cedar Walton** (Sept. 21)—as well as the saxophonist **Greg Osby** (Sept. 20). Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Sept. 18-20: The sui-generis pianist **Ahmad Jamal,** an often acknowledged influence on Miles Davis, and a popular draw ever since his version of "Poinciana" became a crossover hit, in 1958, has marched his way into the jazz canon. This red-carpet event gives Jamal a pair of settings. In the first half of the show, he'll take the stage with his trio; for the second, he'll be backed by the **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Sept. 16-17: The pianist **Mike LeDonne** leads a neo-bop ensemble featuring two hard-line hornmen: the saxophonist **Eric Alexander** and the trumpeter **Jeremy Pelt.** Sept. 18-21: The obsessively literate singer, composer, and pianist **Patricia Barber** turns to the music of an earlier master on her new album, "The Cole Porter Mix." A reverential treatment is highly unlikely.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—Sept. 19: **Cindy Blackman** may be best known as the drummer for the funk rocker Lenny Kravitz, but her jazz credentials have long been in order; she's backed Jackie McLean, Joe Henderson, Pharoah Sanders, Sam Rivers, and many others. Here, she leads a quartet featuring **J. D. Allen** on tenor saxophone.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Sept. 16-21: The **Chris Potter** quartet. The saxophonist Potter is one of the most notable sidemen of his generation, with experience in the bands of Dave Holland and Paul Motian (not to mention a highly publicized stint with Steely Dan). His quartet features the guitarist **Adam Rogers.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964."** Through Dec. 14. ♦ **"J. M. W. Turner."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1717)."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Royal Porcelain from the Twinight Collection: 1800-1850."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Jeff Koons on the Roof."** Through Oct. 26. ♦ **"Rhythms of Modern Life: British Prints 1914-1939."** Opens Sept. 23. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night."** Opens Sept. 21. ♦ **"Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling."** Through Oct. 20. ♦ **"Projects 88: Lucy McKenzie."** Through Dec. 1. ♦ **"Kirchner and the Berlin Street."** Through Nov. 10. ♦ **"New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky."** Through Jan. 5. ♦ **"Looking at Music."** Early music videos by the Residents, Devo, David Bowie, and Captain Beefheart look right at home next to art videos by Joan Jonas, Lucinda Childs, and Bruce Nauman. Laurie Anderson's "Self-Playing Violin" functions as a musical objet d'art, while Steve Reich's 1966 work "Come Out," a recording of one of the Harlem Six played on two channels that fall increasingly out of synch, conflates the categories of new music and sound art. Curated by Barbara London, the show heads deeper into the terrain explored in her "Golden Oldies of Music Video" exhibition, of 2003. Through Jan. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Louise Bourgeois."** Through Sept. 28. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Paul McCarthy: Central Symmetrical Rotation Movement—Three Installations, Two Films."** Through Oct. 12. ♦ **"Progress."** Through Nov. 30. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions"** Opens Sept. 19. ♦ **"Japonisme in American Graphic Art, 1880-1920."** Through Oct. 12. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Lizards and Snakes: Alive!"** Through Jan. 5. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS
1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—**"Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now."** Through Jan. 25. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (212-217-5800)—**"Gothic: Dark Glamour."** Through Feb. 21. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8, and Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave., at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"The Dead Sea Scrolls: Mysteries of the Ancient World."** Opens Sept. 21. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors."** Opens Sept. 19. ♦ **"Liszt in Paris: Enduring Encounters."** Through Nov. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

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NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"After Nature."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Altoids Award: Ei Arakawa, Lauren Kelley, Michael Patterson-Carver, and Michael Stickrod."** Through Oct. 12. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—**"The Dragon's Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan."** Opens Sept. 19. (Open Mondays and Thursdays, 11 to 5, Wednesdays, 11 to 7, Fridays, 11 to 10, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JOHN ASHBERY
The poet shows his New York School roots, mixing words and images in a group of collages that range in date from his student days at Harvard, in the late forties, to this past year. Lapidary little works use old postcards and period game boards as backdrops; some send shout-outs to such compatriots as the artist-poet Joe Brainard. Titles compound the whimsy. In "Jell-O Falls," a mite surfs on a pudding box through a Piranesi ruin; Captain America defends the Smithsonian Institution in "Diffusion of Knowledge"; and "Moon Glow" centers on a teen-age cupid's bare derrière. Through Oct. 4 (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050.)

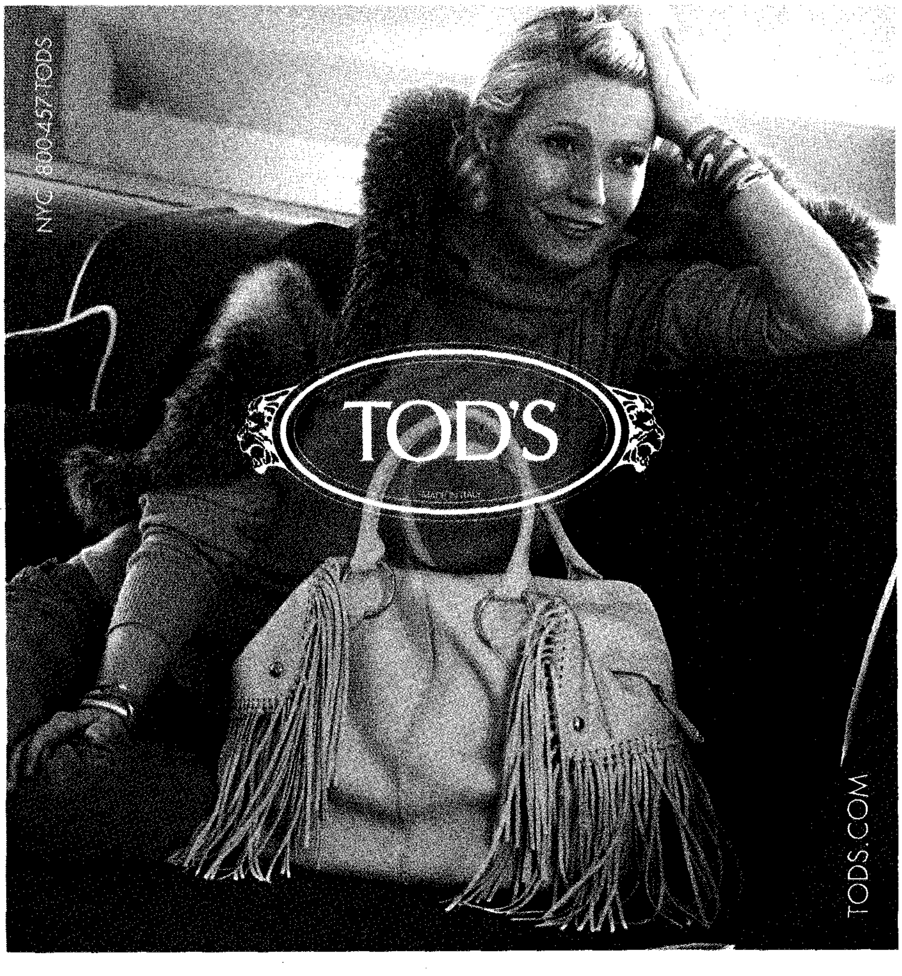
NIC HESS
Anthropomorphic assemblages treat icons of art and design as corpses to be pilfered for parts. Hess monstrously extends the back of Gerrit Reitveld's Red Blue chair until it looks like a torture device, then binds the unwieldy throne to the floor with colored tape. An image of Cézanne's "Boy in a Red Waistcoat," a painting that was recently stolen in Hess's native Switzerland, is collaged into scenes of tropical islands; consider it a portrait of speculation that the thieves' ill-gotten gains are housed in an offshore account somewhere in the Caymans. Through Oct. 3. (The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-1585.)

Short List

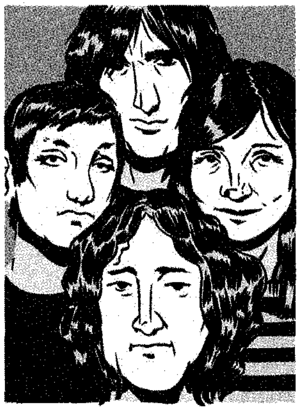
FISCHLI & WEISS: Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060. Through Oct. 18. **JOSEF KOUDELKA / JUDITH JOY ROSS:** Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999. Through Oct. 11. **JANET MALCOLM:** Bookstein, 37 W. 57th St. 212-750-0949. Through Oct. 11. **GIUSEPPE PENONE:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Oct. 11. **"ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM: A WORLD ELSEWHERE":** Haunch of Venison, 1230 Sixth Ave., at 49th St. 212-636-2034. Through Nov. 12. **"THIS PERPETUAL FIGHT: LOVE AND LOSS IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S INTIMATE CIRCLE":** Grolier Club, 47 E. 60th St. 212-838-6680. Through Nov. 22.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

OLIVIER BLANCKART
Like an art-world Madame Tussaud, Blanckart crafts figures—out of paper and tape, not wax—and arranges them in stagy tableaux. In this show, titled "MOMA Don't Preach," Robert Ryman flies like a superhero out of a white painting, while Bruce Nauman reënacts his famous spitting fountain nearby. Nearly life-size versions of the artists Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, and Douglas Huebler stand as if in a police lineup. Blanckart even fashions an art critic based on Paul Strand's famous photograph of a blind beggar,



CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
VALENTINE'S DAY



Those who enjoy brutally loud and highly processed guitar music consider My Bloody Valentine's 1991 album, "Loveless," to be close to heaven. Guitars like a choir of bells and mortar shells! An angel on Vicodin singing in a gorgeous falsetto! Kevin Shields, the band's leader, became something of an Orson Welles after "Loveless," constantly delaying a follow-up album (which never came) and fuelling speculation regarding his one classic album. Did he really make all those noises with nothing but a whammy bar and distortion? (He says so.) There hasn't been a My Bloody Valentine show since 1992, but the band has re-formed to curate part of the "All Tomorrow's Parties" festival and to play a handful of live dates. On record, the band's cherry-chocolate barrage of noise is detailed and dizzying; onstage they sound like an airplane engine. The last time I heard them, in the early nineties, I could not hear properly for days. When they appear at the Roseland Ballroom, on Sept. 22-23, get there early, and bring earplugs.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

PUNY

but the joke feels too shopworn to raise any hackles. Through Oct. 4. (P.P.O.W., 555 W. 25th St. 212-647-1044.)

ROE ETHRIDGE
Ethridge, whose photographs were in the recent Whitney Biennial, attributes the restless, magpie nature of his exhibitions to a "dread of conclusiveness." His latest show includes color pictures of a beach on an overcast day, a plate of oysters, and a nude young woman leaning on a Ionic column. There are also two photographs of a clown and two shots of Caribbean sunsets (taken moments apart), along with several still-lifes, one an homage to Paul Outerbridge. In contrast to Christopher Williams's equally various but far more confounding conceptual work, Ethridge's canny, open-ended approach invites everyone in. Through Oct. 4. (Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849.)

JANE HAMMOND
In her first New York exhibition devoted entirely to photographic work, Hammond shows digital collages that combine elements from found photographs into odd and outlandish tableaux. In one, Elvis Presley escorts a bride with the photographer's smiling face down an aisle lined with mummified figures. Lacking satirical bite, these pieces are too easy to dismiss as mere entertainments. Much more focussed and provocative are Hammond's large, scrapbook-like groupings of reworked flea-market snapshots, each of which now features her face. Here, with considerable élan, she tries on countless identities, slips easily between periods, generations, and genders, and even explores her potential as a cheesecake model. Through Oct. 11. (Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470.)

CHRISTIAN MARCLAY
Marclay has never pinned himself down to a single medium, but he does have one overriding subject: sound. For this subtly spectacular series of cyanotype photograms, he unspooled cassette tapes and let the ribbons dangle and drape across broad expanses. Exposed to light and recorded as white scrawls on a background of Prussian blue, these random compositions suggest the aftermath of a wild party or a ticker-tape parade—part exhilarating high, part letdown. Marclay nods to gestural abstraction (Cy Twombly, Brice Marden), but he's not trying to disguise his mundane materials or muffle the work's sonic undertow. Through Oct. 11. (Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

SHEILA METZNER
Good taste can be more of a burden than an asset to an artist, but it doesn't stifle Metzner's photographs—it enriches them. This densely hung survey of nearly a hundred nudes, portraits, still-lifes, landscapes, and botanical studies from the past forty years is proof of her ability to balance refinement and sensuality, classical allusions and private passions. There are echoes here of Horst, Blossfeldt, Man Ray, and Mapplethorpe, but Metzner has her own sophisticated visual language and a carefully controlled appetite for the exquisite. Although the prints themselves—most made using the grainy Fresson process—are gorgeous, her eye for form and texture is what gives the work its soul. Through Oct. 4. (Visual Arts Museum, 209 E. 23rd St. 212-592-2145.)

Short List

LOUISE BOURGEOIS: Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through Nov. 1. **MATTHEW DAY JACKSON:** Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055. Through Nov. 8; Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Oct. 18. **JOSEF KOUDELKA:** Aperture, 547 W. 27th St. 212-505-5555. Through Oct. 30. **SYDNEY LICHT:** Markel, 529 W. 20th St. 212-366-5368. Through Oct. 4. **VIK MUNIZ:** Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2340. Through Oct. 11. **ALIX PEARLSTEIN:** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through Oct. 18. **MARTHA ROSLER:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through Oct. 11. **TONY SMITH:** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through Oct. 25. **JOEL STERNFELD:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through Oct. 4. **SUE WILLIAMS:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Oct. 25.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

TAM OCHIAI
Cat lovers, this one's for you. The show was inspired by Tiam O'Shian IV, a prize-winning Siamese—bred in England in 1899—whose name is a near-homonym of the artist's. In one sculpture, a long white tube leads to a television playing a video of a cat at rest and at play. Next to it, a plaster cat reclines on a Casio keyboard, producing a low, dissonant drone. If you note scratches on the sculptures, don't be alarmed: Ochiai brought cats into the gallery before the show opened. The marks echo some of the drawings installed on one wall, which simulate paw swipes. Through Oct. 4. (Team, 83 Grand St. 212-279-9219.)

"SCRAWL"
Since 1985, Harley Spiller, an inveterate collector of the effluvia of New York streets, has maintained an archive—bits of cardboard, paper scraps, stickers—emblazoned with paranoid rants on politics, religion, sex, and outsider theories of physics. New Yorkers know these screeds well: taped to the sides of buildings or lampposts, posted in subway cars or laundromats, they abandon the usual terms of debate for conspiracy theories, personal invectives, and pleas for cash. They're ardent, emphatic, sometimes scary, and may make you love the city just a little bit more—as Spiller writes, "NYC can be trying at its best, a war zone at its worst. Who's to say who's crazy?" Through Oct. 11. (Apexart, 291 Church St. 212-431-5270.)

DANCE

"FALL FOR DANCE"
A sampler, a primer, a bargain, City Center's festival is now an institution. The spread is similar to that of years past: twenty-eight companies divided over six programs, four of which are offered twice; ballet, modern, tap, hula, Thai, Odissi. Highlights from the first half include the company of Shen Wei, the choreographer of the Olympics opening ceremonies; Merce Cunningham Dance Company; American Ballet Theatre, previewing its Tudor celebration; and the New York débuts of Pichet Klunchun's Thai company and the troupe of Hofesh Shechter, the Israeli-born London sensation. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Sept. 17-20 at 8, Sept. 21 at 3, and Sept. 23 at 8. Through Sept. 27.)

"CHAM! RITUAL DANCES OF BHUTAN"
The Rubin Museum is bringing a group of thirteen Tantric Buddhist monks from Trongsa, who will illustrate *cham*, or demon-subjugation dances, performed in elaborate dress to the accompaniment of chanting and percussion. (For a full schedule, visit www.rmanyc.org/bhutan or call 212-620-5000, ext. 344. Through Sept. 21.)

JAZZ TAP ENSEMBLE
The veteran Sam Weber applies his technical wizardry to routines by Bill Robinson and Fred Astaire, and Jason Samuels Smith uses his to incarnate John Bubbles and Gregory Hines. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Sept. 16-17 at 7:30, Sept. 18-19 at 8, Sept. 20 at 2 and 8, and Sept. 21 at 2 and 7:30.)

NEW YORK MUSICAL THEATRE FESTIVAL
Within the packed schedule of new works looking for an audience are a few pieces that belong to an even harder to sell subgenre, the dance musical. "Ward 9," choreographed, co-written, and co-directed by Matt Williams, portrays an asylum

ASPEN - BAL HARBOUR - BEVERLY HILLS - LAS VEGAS - NEW YORK
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inhabited by the most famous of mentally unstable artists (Van Gogh, Plath, Nijinsky, etc.), all moving to music by their fellow-inmate Beethoven. In "Sophia's Fall," the choreographer Jason Summers offers a feminist creation myth, centered on the "feminine divine" and driven by a rock band. And in "Wild About Harry" four choreographers take on the story of Leona Helmsley and her dog. (For a full schedule, see www.nymf.org.)

RAFAEL AMARGO

A sex symbol in Europe, the young flamenco dancer has appeared, in stubble, on the covers of many glossy magazines. His shows are often the theatrical equivalent of those publications: high production values, multimedia elements, lots of ensemble work, and much stylish and superficial borrowing from contemporary forms. Against this backdrop, "Tiempo Muerto" is something of a return to first principles. There are still smoke machines, but the costumes are simpler, and the focus is more on the musician-dancer conversation. Besides being a heartthrob, Amargo is a strong and charismatic dancer, capable of drawing on his traditional training when he chooses. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-317-4000. Sept. 20 at 8 and Sept. 21 at 3.)

"RAJASTHAN—MUSIC AND DANCE OF THE DESERT"

This World Music Institute presentation is mostly music: the ecstatic Sufi traditions of northwestern India performed by the hereditary musicians of the Rupayan ensemble. But the Kalapriya Dancers, based in Chicago and led by the Rajasthan-born Pranita Jain, will also be on hand to demonstrate some of the region's folk dances. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-545-7536. Sept. 20 at 8.)

WHIRLING DERVISHES OF DAMASCUS

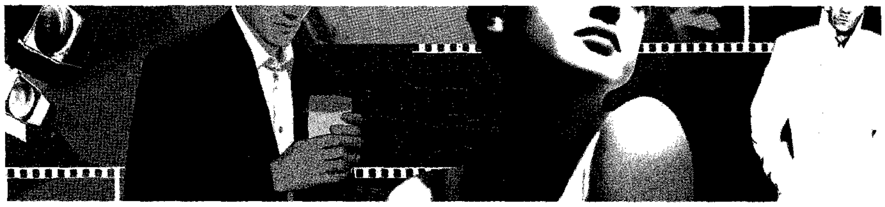
This mystical dance form was created in the thirteenth century by the Sufi mystic Rumi, as a form of devotion and a path to enlightenment. As the dancers spin endlessly on their own axis—upper bodies in repose, one arm raised toward the divine—their white skirts billow, while the music gradually accelerates and builds toward ecstasy. The dervishes perform to Sufi texts, sung here in a rich, mellifluous voice by Sheikh Hamza Shakkur, choirmaster at the Great Mosque of Damascus, and accompanied by the fine players of Ensemble Al-Kindi. (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-545-7536. Sept. 21 at 7.)

"WORKS & PROCESS"

The Guggenheim's illuminating discussion and performance series brings together two contrasting choreographers—the downtown modernist Pam Tanowitz and the whimsical ballet maker Brian Reeder—for an intriguing experiment in hybridization. The two have taken the challenge in earnest, seeking a true collaboration, blurring and even concealing differences in style and technique. In an added twist, the "Project Runway" designer Jillian Lewis, who once trained to be a ballet dancer, has created the costumes. The *Wall Street Journal* dance critic Robert Greskovic will moderate the discussion. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Sept. 21-22 at 7:30.)

BALLET NY

The fact that a small chamber ballet company like this one can make it to its tenth year is reason to celebrate. Its directors—Judith Fugate, a former New York City Ballet principal, and Medhi Bahiri, a veteran of Béjart, among other companies—are committed to commissioning new works from emerging choreographers. The results vary, but the committed ensemble of nine brings out the best in each work. They will be performing two new ballets (one by a frequent contributor, Thaddeus Davis, the other by Andrew Blight, based in Pittsburgh) as well as an imaginative piece about the vicissitudes of a dinner party ("Table Games") and a raucous romp set to klezmer music, "Manny's Mission." (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Sept. 23 at 7:30. Through Sept. 28.)



DVD NOTES
THE DANCE OF TIME

His elaborate travelling shots suffice to make Max Ophüls one of the cinema's great stylists, but, as seen in **"Le Plaisir,"** from 1952 (released by Criterion along with "The Earrings of Madame de . . ." and "La Ronde"), what makes him a great director is his fusion of style and substance.

Ophüls used space to capture time; his camera plunges with ardent anticipation into the future or glides nostalgically into the mists of memory, conjuring an intense, bittersweet romanticism. The first part of "Le Plaisir," an adaptation of three stories by Maupassant, depicts an old man who dances himself to the point of collapse at a grand ball in pursuit of his lost allure as a ladies' man. The search for a doctor offers spectacularly costumed and decorated views of a great dance palace in a vertiginous tracking shot that moves from one character to the next before wandering off into the rhythmic throng of revellers. Ophüls extracts every centime of value from his elaborate sets, placing balustrades, bannisters, hedges, furniture, and all sorts of other impediments between the camera and the characters, as if spying on intimate transactions from a discreet remove. No other director has so touchingly conveyed the exquisite social graces that arise from the pursuit of animal lust.

For his first feature film, **"Dragonwyck,"** from 1946 (packaged, oddly, in the "Fox Horror Classics, Vol. 2" boxed set), Joseph L. Mankiewicz directed a gothic romance, set in upstate New York in the eighteen-forties and rooted in the political history of its place and time, that plays out like a blend of Poe and Tocqueville. The story concerns young Miranda Wells (Gene Tierney), a pious Yankee farmer's daughter, who enters service as a nanny in the lavish (and haunted) Hudson Valley mansion of Nicholas Van Ryn (Vincent Price)—and whom Van Ryn conspires to marry, once he disposes of his wife. As patroons, descendants of the region's original Dutch settlers, Van Ryn and his peers ludicrously re-create European court culture, complete with the feudal domination of their tenant farmers, who finally rebel. Mankiewicz anchors the drama in actual events from New York State's violent Anti-Rent War, such as a famous murder trial, the election of John Young as governor on a land-reform platform, and a doctor (here played by Glenn Langan) who leads the strikers. With his prosaic style, Mankiewicz invokes political intrigues that elude the romantic Ophüls—yet he reserves his most poetic flourish for an elaborate travelling shot to film the dance in which Miranda is ultimately snared in Van Ryn's web.

—Richard Brody

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

The first two opening nights of Peter Gelb's tenure at the Met were groundbreaking events that featured daring new productions; this year, he returns to the Joseph Volpe formula in shaping an evening around a single star—in this case, Renée Fleming. She sings in Act II of **"La Traviata,"** Act III of **"Manon,"** and the final scene from **"Capriccio,"** partnered by Ramón Vargas, Thomas Hampson, Dwayne Croft, and Robert Lloyd; James Levine, Marco Armiliato, and Patrick Summers, respectively, conduct. (Sept. 22 at 6:30.) ♦ Karita Mattila's jaw-dropping performance in the title role of **"Salome"** in 2004 set New York on its ear, with her (very) brief nude scene adding to the excitement. Can she do it again? Jürgen Flimm's production, at once worldly and mystical, returns as well, with Ildikó Kómlosi, Kim Begley, Joseph Kaiser, and Juha Uusitalo completing the cast; the young Finnish conductor Mikko Franck makes his Met début. (Sept. 23 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

LA MAMA ETC: "CALLING"

The legendary performance space—downtown, and daring—lives up to both its strengths by presenting the first professional staging of Douglas Geers's opera, a September 11th scenario that harks back to "Our Town" in its communitarian ethos. Wickham Boyle directs the production, which is based on her book "A Mother's Essays from Ground Zero." (74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Sept. 18-20 at 8 and Sept. 21 at 2:30 and 8. Through Sept. 28.)

VERTICAL PLAYER REPERTORY: "THE TALES OF HOFFMANN"

Offenbach's final opera, about the misadventures of a young, idealistic artist and social outcast, is mounted by a passel of young, idealistic artists in an appropriately scruffy setting—the Brooklyn waterfront. Judith Barnes's intrepid company returns to the Red Hook Marine Terminal (where it staged Puccini's "Il Tabarro" last year) for a production directed by Seth Baumrin and Adrienne D. Williams (and featuring Barnes as the courtesan Giulietta). (Hamilton Ave. at Van Brunt St. 212-868-4444. Sept. 19 and Sept. 21 at 8.)

AMATO OPERA: "COSÌ FAN TUTTE"

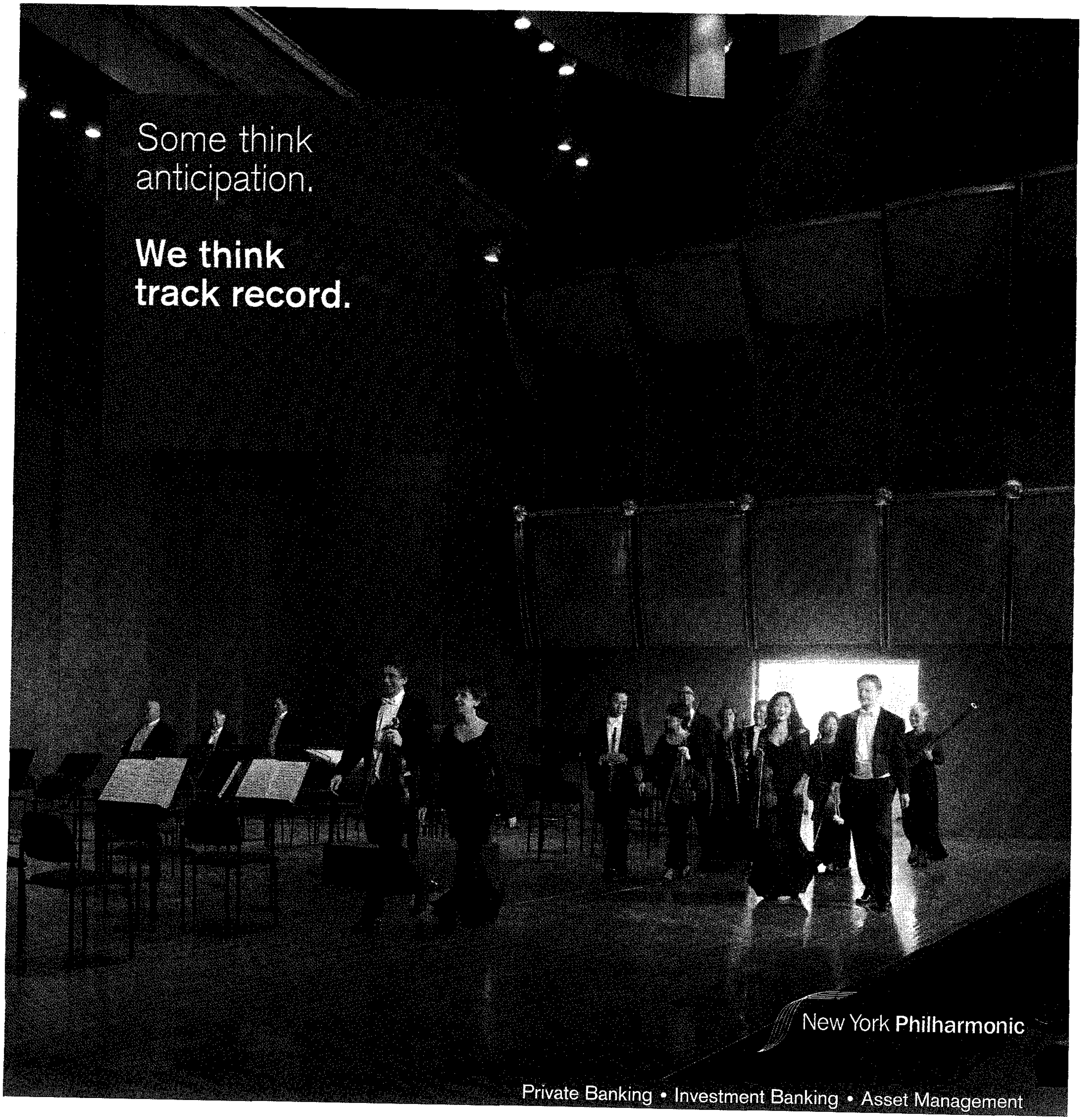
Traditionalists looking for safe harbor this week can visit Anthony Amato's *piccola casa* in the East Village, where classics are dispatched with the gusto of an Italian hill-town company by a mixture of professionals and amateurs. Mozart's immortal battle of the sexes is the first offering of the season. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Sept. 20 at 7:30 and Sept. 21 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Lorin Maazel begins his seventh and final season as the music director of the New York Philharmonic with an opening-night gala program designed to please: Berlioz's "Roman Carnival" Overture and Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, with Ibert's charming Flute Concerto (offered by James Galway) in between. (Sept. 17 at 7:30. Note: A free dress rehearsal will be offered to the public at 9:45 A.M. on the same day.) ♦ The season's first subscription program is more substantial, with works by Rachmaninoff (the Piano Concerto No. 3, with the commanding Yefim Bronfman), Ravel, and Bartók (the "Miraculous Mandarin"

JOHN RITTER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We think
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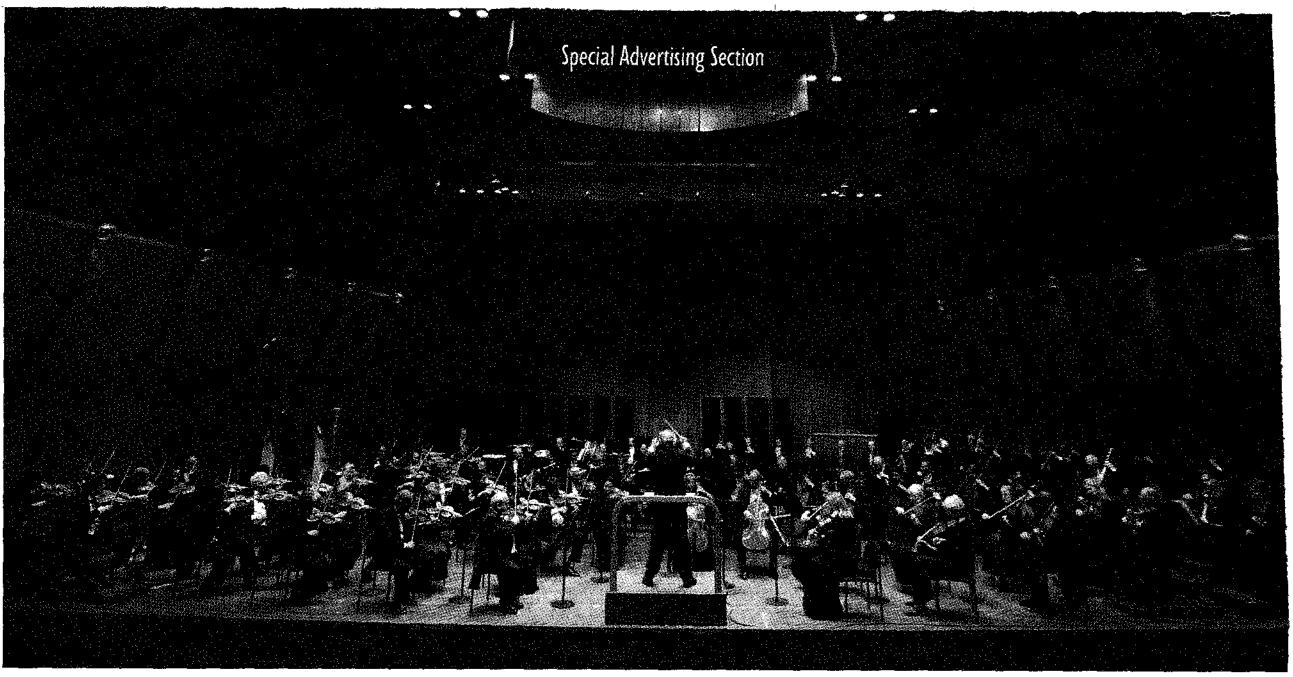

CREDIT SUISSE AND NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Celebrating a Season of Milestones and Highlights.

Credit Suisse—in its second year as the exclusive global sponsor of the New York Philharmonic—is proud to support the Orchestra's 2008-2009 season, its 167th, to be marked by many milestones and highlights including a U.S. tour. Credit Suisse continues to enhance its international presence alongside the Orchestra as it shares its diverse repertoire through performances around the world.

Credit Suisse is proud of the tremendous success of the Philharmonic's premier Asia Tour 2008, which marked the Orchestra's first-ever visit to Shanghai and the Bank's first tour as global sponsor. In the most substantial tour of the region in the Philharmonic's history, the Orchestra traveled to Taipei and Kao-hsiung, Taiwan; Hong Kong; and Beijing and Shanghai.

Paul Calello, the chief executive officer of Credit Suisse, recognizes the early success of the partnership, one that he says embodies the values of both organizations, including tradition, innovation, and excellence. "The first year of Credit Suisse's partnership with the New York Philharmonic has exceeded our expectations in terms of the caliber of client events, and we've been consistently impressed by the level of performances," he said. "As we begin the second year of our sponsorship, we anticipate with pleasure another great season as the New York Philharmonic's exclusive global sponsor."

Most recently, the Philharmonic embarked on a nine-city, fourteen-concert tour of Europe, its first tour of the Continent with Credit Suisse's support. At the BBC Proms in London, it performed the world première of Steven Stucky's "Rhapsodies," a New York Philharmonic co-commission. The Orchestra also played at the Rheingau Music Festival in Frankfurt, the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival in Hamburg, and the Lucerne Festival; in concerts in Essen, Paris, Stuttgart, and Baden-Baden; and at the Beethovenfest in Bonn.

Later this season, the Orchestra will embark on its Winter U.S. Tour 2009. As always, classical music lovers can look forward to the Philharmonic's masterly programs throughout the tour.

What will be Maestro Lorin Maazel's seventh and final season features works that reflect the artists with whom he has worked closely, and, above all, his deep and close relationship with the musicians of the Philharmonic. The celebrations will include such anticipated programs as a salute to Leonard Bernstein, an evening of Mahler's Symphony No. 8, and a performance of operatic favorites by Johann Strauss, Jr., Jacques Offenbach, and Franz Lehár. Each will showcase the artistry and excellence of the Orchestra.

"The New York Philharmonic is proud to celebrate the dedication, passion, and unsurpassed musicianship of Lorin Maazel," says Philharmonic president and executive director Zarin Mehta. "This season truly reflects the vast influence he has had on our programming and performance."

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For the complete 2008-2009 New York Philharmonic season schedule, visit nyphil.org.

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Suite), preceded by the U.S. première of Steven Stucky's "Rhapsodies." (Sept. 18 and Sept. 23 at 7:30, Sept. 19 at 2, and Sept. 20 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC
Tradition and innovation clash delightfully at the floating chamber-music series. Sept. 17 at 8: The avant-garde trio Real Quiet—staffed, impressively, by the percussionist David Cossin, the cellist Felix Fan, and the pianist Andrew Russo—offers the latest entry in the barge's "Here and Now" series of concerts of contemporary American works, a program featuring music by a West Coast legend, Lou Harrison, and by three of Gotham's downtown stars, Phil Kline, Annie Gosfield ("Wild Pitch"), and Evan Ziporyn (the world première of "Where Was I?"). ♦ Sept. 19-20 at 8: Since turnabout is fair play, the violinist Mark Peskanov, the barge's director, counters with a nod to an elegant, irretrievable past—a tribute to the dashing violinist Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908) that features not only works by Handel and Beethoven (the "Kreutzer" Sonata) but several of Sarasate's effervescent, lighter compositions (including the "Zigeunerweisen" and the "Carmen" Fantasy). Doris Stevenson accompanies him. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

MATA "INTERVAL" SERIES: GRÚPAT
This young musical and political collective—which also, ironically, calls itself the Avant Gardaí, after Ireland's police force—is usually found performing concerts, installations, and "interventions" in and around South Dublin, where its members live. They join a friend, the vocalist Jennifer Walshe, and the New York experimentalist ensemble Object Collection for a concert of their whimsical but radical compositions at Brooklyn's cutting-edge Issue Project Room. (232 3rd St. www.matafestival.org. Sept. 17; doors open at 8.)

CASSATT STRING QUARTET: JOAN TOWER 70TH BIRTHDAY SERIES
New York's admired all-female ensemble begins a series of three concerts devoted to the string quartets of Joan Tower, at Symphony Space. All the programs will feature a work by another prominent contemporary composer, along with a repertory classic; the first offers not only Tower's "Night Fields" but also the New York première of Libby Larsen's "She Wrote" and Ravel's Quartet in F Major. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Sept. 18 at 7:30.)

CONCERTANTE
The vibrant young string ensemble, which usually likes to showcase new works, returns to tradition in its next concert, collaborating with the oboist Robert Ingliss to offer classic pieces for oboe and strings by Mozart (the Quartet for Oboe and Strings, K. 370) and Britten (the "Phantasy Quartet") as well as Brahms's rhapsodic String Quintet in G Major, Op. 111. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Sept. 22 at 7:30.)

PHILIPPE QUINT
Though born in Russia, this young violinist (a lauded Juilliard graduate) is making his name as a champion of contemporary American music. His upcoming recital—unaccompanied—at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall features works by Virgil Thomson, John Corigliano (three excerpts from "The Red Violin Caprices"), and Lera Auerbach as well as classics of the genre by Paganini, Ysaÿe, and Bach (the Chaconne in D Minor). (212-247-7800. Sept. 23 at 8.)

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG
Some concerts of New York's longtime celebration of the voice range into little-known corners of the repertory; others stay close to home. Its season-opening program is definitely in the latter category: songs by two masters of eclecticism, Leonard Bernstein (from such works as "Songfest" and "Arias and Barcarolles") and William Bolcom (from the opera "McTeague," the song cycle "I Will Breathe a Mountain," and the ubiquitous "Cabaret Songs"). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Sept. 23 and Sept. 25 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

TANNERY POND
Summer fades away slowly at this high-class upstate series, the brainchild of the renowned photographer Christian Steiner. In one of its final concerts, two estimable chamber-music masters—the violinist Robert McDuffie and the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott—perform bedrock sonatas for violin and piano by Brahms (the limpid Sonata No. 1 in G Major), Ravel, and Beethoven (No. 7 in C Minor) in the festival's home base, a converted tannery barn nestled in a miniature Shaker village. (Darrow School, New Lebanon, N.Y. 888-820-9441. Sept. 20 at 8.)

MOVIES
OPENING

ALL OF US
A documentary, directed by Emily Abt, about Dr. Mehret Mandefro, a doctor in the South Bronx who studies the prevalence of H.I.V. among African-American women. Opening Sept. 19. (Cinema Village.)

APPALOOSA
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Sept. 19. (In limited release.)

BATTLE IN SEATTLE
A docudrama, directed by Stuart Townsend, about the anti-globalization protests in Seattle in 1999. Starring André Benjamin, Woody Harrelson, and Charlize Theron. Opening Sept. 19. (Angelika Film Center.)

THE DUCHESS
A historical drama about Georgina, the Duchess of Devonshire, and her scandalous love life. Starring Keira Knightley and Ralph Fiennes; directed by Saul Dibb. Opening Sept. 19. (In wide release.)

ELITE SQUAD
José Padilha directed this crime drama, from Brazil, in which an officer and his colleagues raid a drug-infested favela. In Portuguese. Opening Sept. 19. (Sunshine Cinema.)

GHOST TOWN
David Koepp directed this comedy, about a man who sees ghosts, including one who wants him to help break up his widow's impending remarriage. Starring Ricky Gervais, Greg Kinnear, and Téa Leoni. Opening Sept. 19. (In wide release.)

HOUNDDOG
In this drama, set in the nineteen-fifties, directed by Deborah Kampmeier, a young girl (Dakota Fanning) living in rural Alabama is raped as she tries to scrounge up a ticket for an Elvis Presley concert. Opening Sept. 19. (Village Theatre VII.)

IGOR
An animated comedy, directed by Anthony Leondis, about a mad scientist's assistant who dreams of striking out on his own. With the voices of Steve Buscemi, John Cleese, and Molly Shannon. Opening Sept. 19. (In wide release.)

LAKEVIEW TERRACE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 19. (In wide release.)

MY BEST FRIEND'S GIRL
A comedy, directed by Howard Deutch, about a man (Dane Cook) whose best friend asks him to take out his ex-girlfriend (Kate Hudson) on a bad date to make him look good by comparison. Opening Sept. 19. (In wide release.)

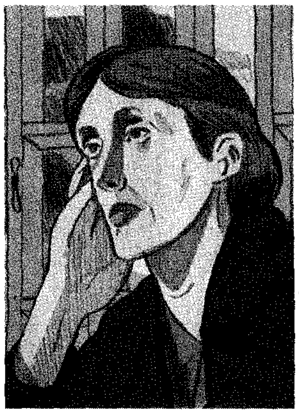
QUILOMBO COUNTRY
A documentary, directed by Leonard Abrams and narrated by Chuck D, about Brazilian communities founded by escaped slaves. Opening Sept. 19. (Pioneer Theatre.)

TAKING FATHER HOME
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Sept. 19. (Pioneer Theatre.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BIG BAD WOOLF

The majority of Virginia Woolf's better-known novels, including "To the Lighthouse" and "The Waves," are famous for their interior monologues but not their dialogue. Still, the nervously productive Woolf had an interest in drama, being so theatrical herself. In 1935, her only play, "Freshwater," a fantastic comedy about her great-aunt, the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, and her circle, was performed at her sister Vanessa Bell's London painting studio. It was revived in 1983, starring Eugene Ionesco. Now the play—along with Eileen Atkins's lovely character study "Vita and Virginia," about Woolf's relationship with the aristocratic Vita Sackville-West—is being presented at the Grolier Club in conjunction with an exhibition of Woolfiana—photographs, letters, and ephemera—called "This Perpetual Fight: Love and Loss in Virginia Woolf's Intimate Circle." But "Freshwater" belies the seriousness of the exhibit's title: the play is pure imagined gossip, which Woolf enjoyed chronicling, too.

—*Hilton Als*



RACHEL DOMM

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TAKING OFF

David Lean's "The Sound Barrier," screening Sept. 17 at Film Forum in a newly restored version issued to celebrate the director's centennial, was made in 1952, when the successful attempts in the late nineteen-forties to fly at the speed of sound were still fresh in the audience's memory. The aerodynamic issues in the movie may now be antiquated, but the excitement and beauty of early jet aviation are still irresistible. With its screenplay by Terence Rattigan and stunning black-and-white cinematography by Jack Hildyard, the movie has a romantic and heroic spirit, yet very much reflects the modest style of the late British Empire. The jaunty R.A.F. veterans (Nigel Patrick and John Justin) sacrifice themselves for the sake of scientific progress without fear or regret. Ralph Richardson is the aircraft manufacturer who ushers in the future with an iron will but suffers in silence when men die; Ann Todd is his daughter, married to one of the pilots, who keeps asking why lives have to be sacrificed, to which the men respond with one variation or another on the sentiment "Either you get it or you don't"—not a notable improvement on "Because it's there."

—*David Denby*

A THOUSAND YEARS OF GOOD PRAYERS
Wayne Wang directed this drama, about two elderly immigrants, a man from China and a woman from Iran, who begin a relationship. In Mandarin, English, and Farsi. Opening Sept. 19. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

NOW PLAYING

APPALOOSA
This old-school neo-oater, an adaptation of Robert B. Parker's novel, directed by and starring Ed Harris as Virgil Cole, a tight-lipped hired gun, respects the codes and classics of the genre without adding much to them. Cole and his sidekick, Everett Hitch (Viggo Mortensen), ride into the New Mexico outpost of Appaloosa and are recruited to be marshal and deputy by the town fathers in order to rid it of the ruthless Bragg gang and to arrest its murderous leader, Randall Bragg (Jeremy Irons). There's never any doubt as to who wears the white hats and who will prevail, but the twisty action, trim performances, and modest, reserved direction make the film engaging, if not engrossing. Clever behavioral touches (such as Cole's speech impediment) can't mask the absence of ambiguity, psychological depth, and historical resonance, but a whiff of political irony near the end suggests unexplored byways, and the character of Allison French (Renée Zellweger), a widow who comes to town and works her wiles, adorns the period landscape with modern mores.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

BANGKOK DANGEROUS
A remake, by the Hong Kong-born twins Danny and Oxide Pang, of their Thai hit movie of 1999. This time, it is Nicolas Cage who plays the lonely assassin. Whether Bangkok was dangerous before he got there, or whether it only became dangerous on his arrival, is never made clear; the fact remains that he has four men to murder, and only a local ne'er-do-well named Kong (Shahkrit Yamnarm) to assist him. With its dark and drained colors and its yawning gap where a sense of humor is supposed to be, the movie works hard to suggest that there is both art and mystery to the calling of the hit man, but not everyone will be convinced. Beneath his lank locks, Cage looks bored and out of sorts, even during his mild flirtation with a mute pharmacist (Charlie Young); in any case, the film is scarcely in a position to flag up our hero's sentimental side, having spent so long telling us that he doesn't possess one. The same goes for his sudden attack of conscience, which causes his final task to go badly awry. Put this killer up against Edward Fox in "The Day of the Jackal," let alone Alain Delon in "Le Samouraï," and he wouldn't last two shots.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/8/08.) (In wide release.)

BURN AFTER READING
This very black comedy by the Coen brothers is set in the pale-white light of a rather blanched Washington, D.C., an uninspiring and uncomfortable place in which everyone betrays everyone and the tone veers between icy politeness and spitting rage and then back again. The movie has abundant momentum—short, tightly knit scenes of people arguing, driving around, screwing, and fighting—but the farcical plot is so bleak and unfunny that it freezes your responses after about forty-five minutes. Frances McDormand is the gym administrator who thinks she needs money for extensive work on her face, arms, and tummy so she can meet better guys through an Internet dating service; Brad Pitt is her friend, a feckless, pre-sexual child who is constantly sucking on a water bottle. The two haplessly try to blackmail a canned, choleric C.I.A. agent (John Malkovich), and they cross paths with a variety of other lost people, including George Clooney's lightweight Lothario, a U.S. marshal who would sleep with a butterfly. Some of the actors show great professional skill, but the meanness of the entire conception is tiresome. The movie is the most emotionally stunted work of the brothers' career to date. With Tilda Swinton and Richard Jenkins.—*David Denby* (9/15/08) (In wide release.)

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE
This 1920 silent production, starring John Barrymore in his matinée-idol prime, extends Robert Louis Stevenson's tale to the Manichaean limit. The good doctor starts out too good for the tastes of his own future father-in-law, a habitué of Victorian London's sexual underworld, who thinks Jekyll isn't experienced enough. He drags Jekyll to a music hall that features a voluptuous dancer (Nita Naldi)—and thus paves the way for Hyde. When Barrymore made this film, he was preparing for a role as Hamlet and playing Richard III onstage; the melancholy Dane influences his Jekyll, just as the jesting, malevolent humpback does his Hyde. Contrary to conventional wisdom, what's extraordinary about Barrymore's Hyde is not how much he achieves without makeup but how well he uses his charisma to electrify the makeup. The movie attains otherworldly horror when its special effects grow more extreme: at one point Hyde appears as a furry, man-size crab, and in a grisly climactic murder he devolves into a semi-simian vampire—a Neanderthal Nosferatu.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Sept. 17 and Sept. 20.)

A GIRL CUT IN TWO
The girl of the title of Claude Chabrol's impeccably calm and composed new movie is a TV weather presenter called Gabrielle Deneige (Ludivine Sagnier). Though not always as pure as her snowy name, she innocently drifts into the arms of two besmirching men: Charles Saint-Denis (François Berléand), a respected author decades her senior, and Paul Gaudens (Benoît Magimel), a chemicals-fortune heir who is an unsavory compound of dandy, cad, and wacko. Gabrielle is no fortune hunter, so what does she see in this pair? In a way, that is not Chabrol's business. The heart has its reasons, the reasons drive us mad, and his task is to forge a style from the result. His trademarks are all there: the quick, elliptical scenes, the unfussy fades to black, and the pulse of interest that can bring a camera hastening smoothly to inspect the characters, up close and personal, as their feelings ignite. Despite the seventy-eight-year-old director's Charles-like fondness for young flesh, the older people seem to attract him more; age has made them not wiser but more civilized and therefore, from his point of view, more corrupt. He remains as committed as ever to his twin duties as scourge and hedonist, yet one can't help wishing that he would, just once, cast off his own good narrative manners and arrange his passions into shameless, surreal anagrams of wit and lust. In French.—*A.L.* (8/25/08) (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

MISTER FOE
David Mackenzie's new film, like its predecessors "Asylum" (2005) and "Young Adam" (2003), is never less than twisted and involved. Set largely in Edinburgh, it stars Jamie Bell as a troubled teenager named Hallam Foe; his troubles began, we soon learn, when his mother committed suicide, and the movie shows him not so much coming to terms with her death as immersing himself in her memory and, disastrously, finding some way to revive her. That means wearing her clothes and makeup and spying on a colleague from work (Sophia Myles) who resembles her—all of which feels dismayingly credible, although viewers may lose patience as the look-alike takes Hallam into her bed. The incestuous air of the tale spreads beyond the sexual, as when we see the kid burgling his own home or driving a wedge between his father, Julius (Ciarán Hinds), and Verity (Claire Forlani), the woman who is now stealing Julius's heart. The film is shifty and restless to the eye, almost adolescently keen to strip its characters bare, and we feel Hallam's exasperation as Bell, the hero of "Billy Elliot" (2000), tries once again to stomp the rage out of his system.—*A.L.* (9/8/08) (Angelika Film Center.)

MOVING MIDWAY
This fascinating, touching, and intellectually tough-minded documentary by the former film critic Godfrey Cheshire is about a beautiful house near Raleigh, North Carolina—his family's ancestral home and a former slave plantation—that has accumulated the glories and shame of Southern history within its walls. When the area's rudely expansive commercial development deposits incessant traffic and threatens to place a shopping

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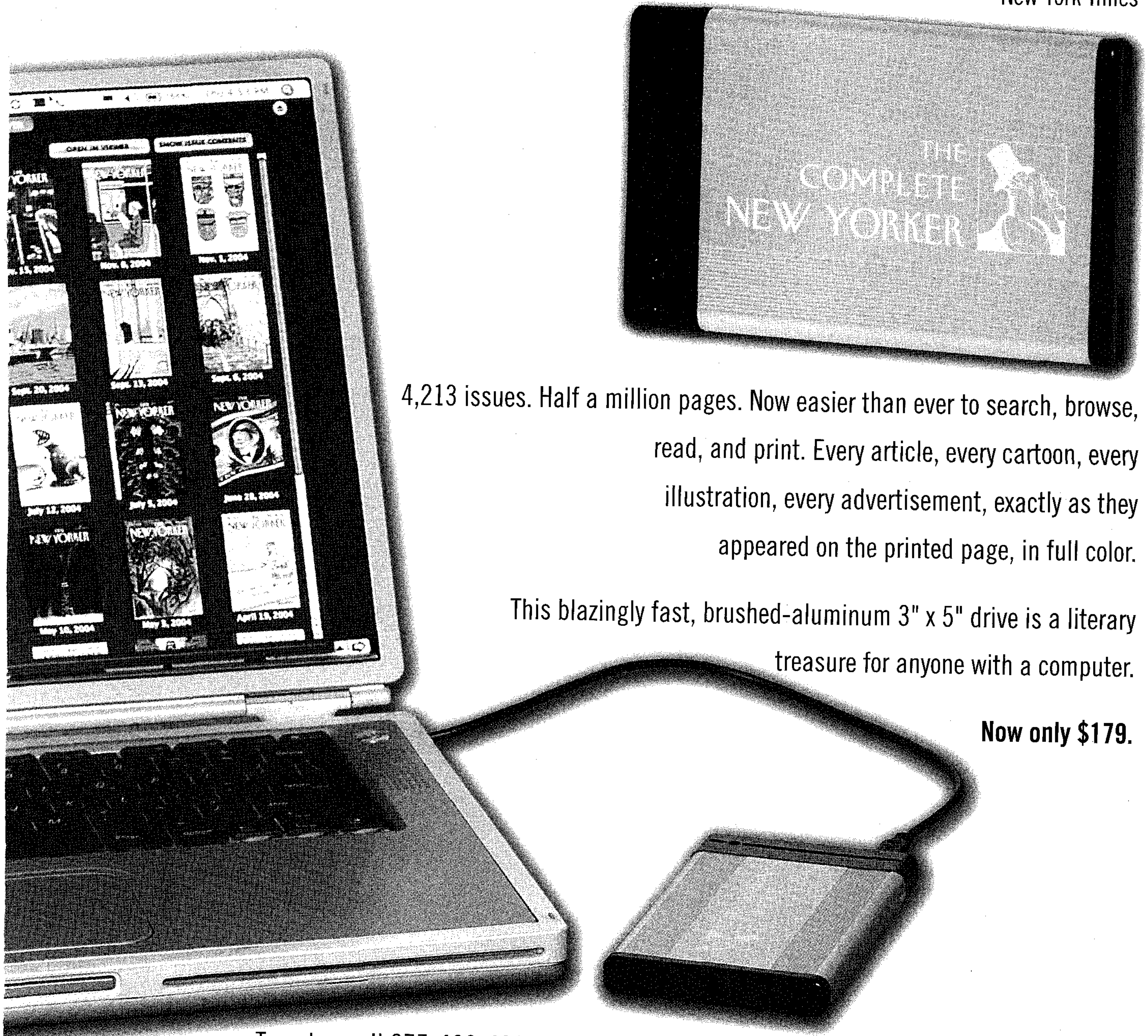

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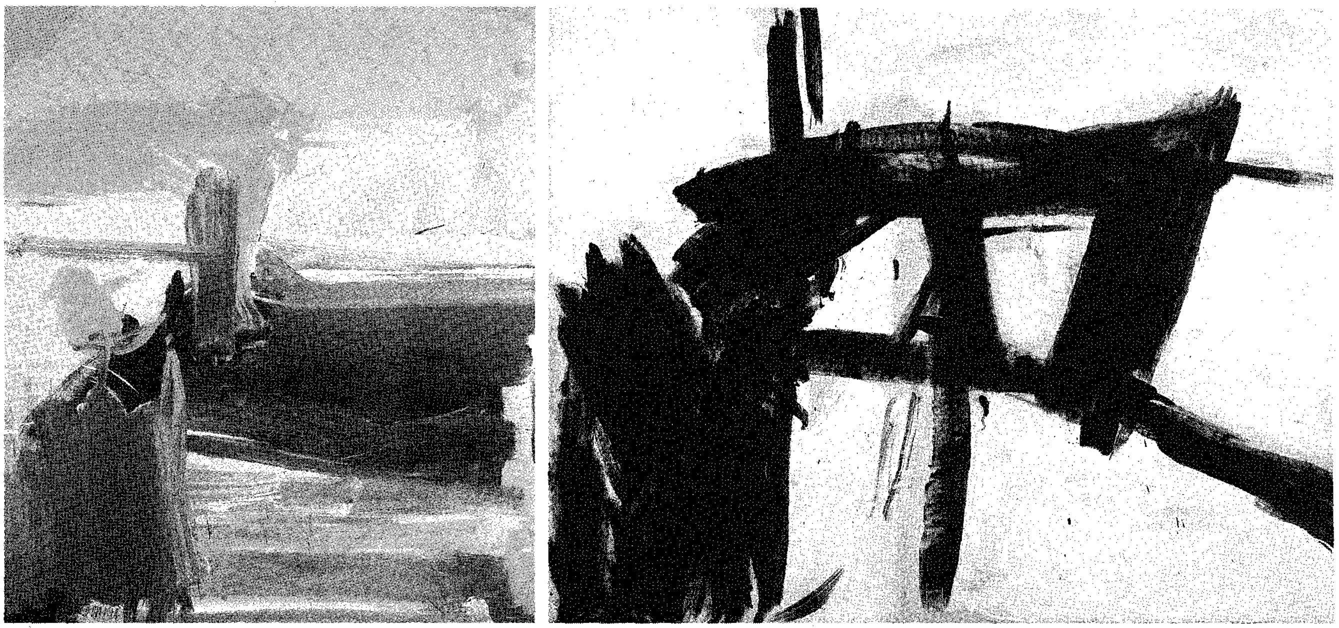
center at the foot of the property, Cheshire's cousin, the current owner, decides to move Midway Plantation and all its attendant myths (slaves were well treated there; a matriarchal ghost, flitting about the rooms, lays claim to an aristocratic lineage derived from Charlemagne) to a new plot of land some miles away. The move brings to light a separate stream of the family, derived from the affair of a great-grandfather and an African-American cook, and black and white relatives, hitherto unknown to one another, gather together. Along the way, Cheshire deconstructs "The Birth of a Nation" and "Gone with the Wind."—*D.D.* (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)



Paintings by Willem de Kooning (left) and Franz Kline, in "Abstract Expressionism: A World Elsewhere," at Haunch of Venison.

LEFT: THE WILLEM DE KOONING FOUNDATION / ARS, NY; RIGHT: THE FRANZ KLINE ESTATE / ARS, NY

PINEAPPLE EXPRESS

It's a two-guys-on-the-run action comedy, based on an old idea by Judd Apatow, who also co-produced. Seth Rogen, a process server in a suit, witnesses a drug rubout; James Franco, Seth's pot dealer, knows the murderer, who goes in pursuit of the two of them with his pals. Both men are stoned all the time, and have to keep reminding themselves, in long, muzzy conversations that are an important part of the picture, that they are actually in serious trouble. The movie, directed by David Gordon Green, has an odd, interesting stop-and-go rhythm. The violence is perpetrated with the means at hand—bongs, lamps, coffeepots—and people often apologize for the damage they are doing. The big shoot-out and explosion at the end, however, are depressingly conventional. With Danny R. McBride as an exceptionally slippery drug distributor who takes a lot of punishment. Written by Rogen and Evan Goldberg.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

A SECRET

Three generations of a French Jewish family as they haunt the memory and emotions of a young man (Mathieu Amalric). Claude Miller's movie, based on "Memory," a novel by Philippe Grimbert, begins in sunshine as the hero, a young boy in the nineteen-fifties, contemplates his goddess mother (Cécile De France) standing on a diving board. What he doesn't know is that all sorts of erotic intrigues swirled around her during the German Occupation and meshed disastrously with the French collaboration. Miller gives us fascinating glimpses of the family's life in both prosperous and straitened times—the movie opens up French Jewish life in a way never before seen in this country. In French.—*D.D.* (IFC Center and Paris.)

THE STRUGGLE

Made in the Bronx (on the streets and in a ramshackle studio) in 1931, D. W. Griffith's last film, a crude, grim, grotesquely sentimental melodrama about an alcoholic's degradation, fits into the rare category of films that are great but not really very good. Incongruously co-written by Anita Loos (who injected the sordid proceedings with verbal wit), the story begins nostalgically, in a beer garden in 1911—the time of Griffith's first triumphs—before moving to a speakeasy in 1923, where the young, jovial Jimmy (Hal Skelly) promises Florrie (Zita Johann), his fiancée, that he'll never touch another drop. The action gets going in the Depression, when Jimmy, now a factory worker, becomes a raging drunk and drags Florrie and their young daughter into poverty and despair. The lumbering, old-fashioned drama, without psychology or subtext, presses forward with an air of relentless foreboding before breaking out into a string of horrible scenes (such as the mess Jimmy makes at his sister's wedding or his squandering of the family's insurance policy). Griffith's cheap, Spartan stagecraft reflects the characters' threadbare milieu; the stagy performances make this, his second sound film, seem less modern than his silent movies, except in its diabolical details—nightmarish close-ups, the jolting harshness of actual street life, and the pathetic reflection of Griffith's own decline—which point toward a second, late career that he was unable to realize.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Sept. 21.)

TAKING FATHER HOME

The Chinese director Ying Liang's first feature film, from 2005, which he made for a few thousand dollars with an amateur cast and crew and a borrowed video camera, displays a world-class aesthetic sense, humanistic sensitivity, and political audacity. The story is simple: a teen-age boy, Xu Yun, leaves his poor rural village in an obsessive quest to find his prodigal and newly prosperous father in the big city of Zigong. Reminiscent of John Ford's "The Searchers," it's set in a milieu akin in many ways to the rampantly violent Wild West, and Ying and his screenwriter, Peng Shan, elicit from their subject a similarly high moral purpose. They evoke a society with no moral code, in which power—whether exercised by lone strongmen, gangland posses, uniformed officers, or unseen voices blaring propaganda in public places—reigns unchecked, and where, as a hardened criminal declares, "the shameless are afraid of the desperate." The action is pressed along by preparations for catastrophic floods, which ultimately attack with a quasi-Biblical wrath. Yet the filmmaker's frustration and anger develop under placid, modestly beautiful, and touching depictions of daily life under siege—both from oppressive authority without and unaddressed demons within. In Mandarin.—*R.B.* (Pioneer Theatre.)

TIGER SHARK

Howard Hawks's rough-and-tumble romantic melodrama, from 1932, begins with a fight to the death in a lifeboat, with the shipwrecked Portuguese fishing-boat captain Mike Mascarenhas (Edward G. Robinson) losing his left hand to sharks while defending his first mate, Pipes (Richard Arlen), by pushing the third man overboard to be eaten. Mike, whose tuna-fishing outfit is based in San Diego, survives and prospers; with his chewy, picturesque accent, prominent scars, single earring, and jovial braggadocio, he's lucky with fish but unlucky in love. Coming to the aid of Quita (Zita Johann), the orphaned daughter of a fisherman who dies in action, he persuades the hardboiled waif to marry him—although the man she loves is really Pipes, his best friend. Mike's true love story is with Pipes as well: the theme of male bonding, which is forged in tough and dangerous work (filmed by Hawks with a documentary veracity) is also brought out in a welter of odd details, as when Mike uses the metal hook that replaces his hand to scratch Pipes's back, inadvertently seconds Pipes's suggestion that he's "a little effeminate," or finds himself alone with Pipes in the bridal chamber on his wedding night. Starting with an exciting and hard-nosed action adventure, Hawks projects the eternal triangle into many dimensions, from the grittily practical to the wildly psychodramatic.—*R.B.* (BAM; Sept. 23.)

TRAITOR

Part thriller, part moral drama, and only so-so either way. Don Cheadle is Samir Horn, a Muslim raised in Chicago who served in the U.S. special services but then "went over" to Islamic terrorists who are planning attacks on America. At least, that's what Clayton (Guy Pearce), a persistent and highly airborne counter-terrorism specialist in the F.B.I., thinks. Despite its fresh settings (it was shot in Morocco and Marseilles, as well as in Chicago) and its view of how terrorists recruit and train people and talk to one another, the movie has the familiar form of something like "Sleeper Cell," a Showtime series from 2005-06 about an African-American Muslim who penetrates a terrorist group in Los Angeles, or of an undercover-cop picture like "Donnie Brasco," in which the good-guy hero enters the Mafia and has to decide whether to take part in crimes in order to sustain his credibility among the hoods. The acting is generally solid, though the terrorist leaders, when you meet them, are suave in the manner of Hollywood Nazis from 1942, who ran art galleries, wore silk dressing gowns, and spoke in the most cultivated tones. With Saïd Taghmaoui, as Omar, an ardent Moroccan terrorist.—*D.D.* (9/1/08) (In wide release.)

TROPIC THUNDER

This comedy begins with a film-within-a-film, a Vietnam War movie that's being filmed on location, a savage spectacular with a bulging budget and a trio of major stars: the depleted tough guy Tugg Speedman (Ben Stiller), the five-time Academy Award winner Kirk Lazarus (Robert Downey, Jr.), and a drug-hazed comic lardass, Jeff Portnoy (Jack Black). When their hapless British director (Steve Coogan) is blown up by a land mine, the stars are left to fend for themselves in the jungle, whereupon they are beset by real enemies—a horde of drug dealers—and forced to fight back. Stiller not only stars in the film but also directed it and wrote the script, with Etan Cohen and Justin Theroux. These guys seem to be filing a stream of reports from the borders of taste; their deepest dread is to stay in the comfort zone. Their most controversial move is to have Downey perform entirely in blackface, but they carefully frame the insult in cooling ironies. As a jab at the movie business, "Tropic Thunder" is flailing and unfocussed, and the caterwauling of the characters and the nastiness (at once silly and bloody) of the special effects leave you feeling more embattled than entertained. It's every man for himself, in every sequence, as though Stiller needed to prove that movie stars—these few, these unhappy few, this band of bastards—were the opposite of noble warriors.—*A.L.* (8/25/08) (In wide release.)

TROUBLE THE WATER
Just before Katrina, a former drug dealer and would-be rapper named Kimberly Roberts, possessed of a new digital camera, decided to stay in her New Orleans house with her husband and take some pictures. The footage, shot from the attic as the water creeps higher, is a chaotic but terrifyingly expressive struggle to record what's going on without dying, the ultimate in existential filmmaking: I shoot, therefore I am. The footage later fell into the hands of the filmmaking team of Carl Deal and Tia Lessin, who recorded Kimberly's return to the mud-carpeted, wrecked neighborhood, two weeks after the storm, and surrounded her story with testimony from survivors. In the end, "trampling over tribulations," as she puts it, Kimberly performs a rap song that reveals her earlier life—a kind of "Song of Myself" that feels fully justified as an anthem of endurance. This movie, along with Spike Lee's "When the Levees Broke," is one of the essential Katrina documents.—*D.D.* (9/15/08) (In limited release.)

Also Playing

AUGUST EVENING: Village East Cinemas. **THE FAMILY THAT PREYS:** In wide release. **RIGHTEOUS KILL:** In wide release. **TOWELHEAD:** In limited release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Robert Downey. Sept. 17-18 at 7:30: "Chafed Elbows" (1966). ♦ Sept. 17 at 9: "Babo 73" (1964). ♦ Sept. 18 at 9: "Moment to Moment" (1975). ♦ The films of Vojtech Jasny. All films are in Czech unless otherwise noted. Sept. 19 at 6:30 and Sept. 21 at 8:30: "All My Good Countrymen" (1968). ♦ Sept. 19 at 9:15, Sept. 21 at 4:30, and Sept. 23 at 7: "The Cassandra Cat" (1963). ♦ Sept. 20 at 4:45 and Sept. 23 at 9: "Why Havel?" (1991). ♦ Sept. 20 at 7 and Sept. 22 at 9:15: "Desire" (1958). ♦ Sept. 20 at 9 and Sept. 22 at 7: "I Survived Certain Death" (1960). ♦ Sept. 21 at 6:30: "Gladys" (1999; in English). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Sept. 20 at 5:30: "Confirmation Day" (1934, Karl Valentin; in German) and "Zéro de Conduite" (1933, Jean Vigo; in French). ♦ Sept. 21 at 5:30: "Eat" (1963, Andy Warhol) and "Fall of the House of Usher" (1928, John Sibley Watson and Melville Webber; silent).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Howard Hawks. Sept. 17 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "To Have and Have Not" (1944). ♦ Sept. 18 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Bringing Up Baby" (1938). ♦ Sept. 19 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Scarface" (1932). ♦ Sept. 20 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "His Girl Friday" (1940). ♦ Sept. 21 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Ball of Fire" (1947). ♦ Sept. 23 at 7: "Tiger Shark" (†) and "The Road to Glory" (1936).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Sept. 25: The films of David Lean. Sept. 17 at 1:15, 5:30, and 9:45: "Hobson's Choice" (1954). ♦ Sept. 17 at 3:20 and 7:35: "The Sound Barrier" (1952). ♦ Sept. 18 at 1, 5:15, and 9:30: "In Which We Serve" (1942, Noel Coward and Lean). ♦ Sept. 18 at 3:10 and 7:25: "The Happy Breed" (1944). ♦ Sept. 19-20 at 2 and 7: "Lawrence of Arabia" (1962). ♦ Sept. 21-22 at 1:30 and 4:30 and Sept. 21 at 7:30: "The Bridge on the River Kwai" (1957). ♦ Sept. 22 at 7:30: "Ryan's Daughter" (1970). ♦ Sept. 23 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Summertime" (1955). ♦ In revival. Sept. 17-18 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "The Godfather" (1972, Francis Ford Coppola). ♦ Sept. 19-25 at 1, 4:45, and 8:20: "The Godfather Part II" (1974, Coppola).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Special screening. Sept. 23 at 7: Film portraits by Marie Losier, including "The Ontological Cowboy" (2005) and "Manuelle Labor" (2007, Losier and Guy Maddin).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Sept. 19-21 at 11 A.M.: "Rite" (1969, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Sept. 19-20: "The Cool Ones" (1967, Gene Nelson).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Sept. 17-19 at 1:30: "Husbands and Wives" (1992, Woody Allen). ♦ "Hollywood on the Hudson: Filmmaking in New York, 1920–39." Sept. 17 at 6 and Sept. 20 at 8:15: "The Green Goddess" (1923, Sidney Olcott; silent). ♦ Sept. 17 at 8:30 and Sept. 20 at 6:15: "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (†). ♦ Sept. 18 at 8:15: "Enchantment" (1921, Robert Vignola; silent). ♦ Sept. 19 at 6:15: "While New York Sleeps" (1920, Charles Brabin; silent). ♦ Sept. 19 at 8:15: "The Letter" (Jean De Limur and Monta Bell; silent). ♦ Sept. 21 at 2: "Way Down East" (1920, D.W. Griffith; silent). ♦ Sept. 21 at 5: "The Struggle" (†). ♦ A tribute to Pierre Rissient. Sept. 18 at 6:30, Sept. 19 and 22 at 8, Sept. 20 at 1, and Sept. 21 at 2:30: "Pierre Rissient: Man of Cinema" (2007, Todd McCarthy). ♦ Sept. 18 at 8:30: "The Mothering Heart" (1913, Griffith; silent) and "Hell's Hinges" (1916, William S. Hart and Charles Swickard; silent). ♦ "Sept. 19 at 6: "Never Fear (The Young Lovers)" (1950, Ida Lupino). ♦ Sept. 20 at 3: "The Big Sky" (1952, Howard Hawks). ♦ Sept. 20 at 6: "Cinq et le Peau" (1982, Rissient; in French). ♦ Sept. 20 at 8:30: "The Piano" (1993, Jane Campion). ♦ Sept. 21 at 4:30: "Bird" (1988, Clint Eastwood). ♦ Sept. 22 at 2: "The Man from London" (2007, Bela Tarr).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Through Nov. 2: "Paul Schrader's Personal Choice." Sept. 21 at 2 and 6:45: "The Walker" (2007, Schrader). ♦ Sept. 21 at 4 and 9: "Out of the Past" (1947, Jacques Tourneur).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Latinbeat 2008." All films are in Spanish unless otherwise noted. Sept. 18 at 2:30 and 7:15: "The Alienist" (1970, Nelson Pereira dos Santos; in Portuguese) and "A Missa do Galo" (1982, Pereira dos Santos; in Portuguese). ♦ Sept. 19 at 4:30 and Sept. 20 at 2: "The Girls" (2007, Rodrigo Marin) and "Women Workers Leaving the Factory" (2005, José Luis Torres Leiva). ♦ Sept. 19 at 6:30, Sept. 20 at 9, and Sept. 21 at 7: "Chile Puede" (2008, Ricardo Larrain). ♦ Sept. 19 at 8:30 and Sept. 21 at 2: "The Sky, the Earth and the Rain" (2008, Torres Leiva). ♦ Sept. 20 at 4:15 and Sept. 21 at 9: "Scrambled Beer" (2007, Cristóbal Valderrama). ♦ Sept. 20 at 6:30 and Sept. 21 at 4:30: "Play" (2005, Alicia Scherson).

TABLES FOR TWO
GENERAL GREENE

229 DeKalb Ave., at Clermont Ave. (718-222-1510)—The General Greene is a restaurant of lowered expectations, in the best possible way. The walls are largely unadorned, most of the tables line up along a (not uncomfortable) wooden bench, the bar stools were once tractor seats. The owner—Nick Morgenstern, formerly of Gilt and Gramercy Tavern—had, until this week, opened up only half of the indoor seating, leaving the rear of the restaurant darkened. ("We wanted to take it incrementally," the general manager explained.) The name derives from Nathanael Greene, a self-taught military man from Rhode Island, who commanded Fort Putnam, in what is now Fort Greene Park, during the Battle of Long Island; but it also plays on the notion of the general store, that neighborhood locus of gossip and goods.

It's clear that the General Greene has set out to become a staple in its own right, most obviously with its burger (concocted with the help of Ryan Skeen, late of Resto and his own acclaimed burger). It's the size of a hockey puck—small in diameter, plump in the middle—but juicy. The flavor is dynamic enough to inspire debate—is there some pork in there, or lamb? Nope: it's a hundred per cent Angus beef, from DeBragga, at a seventy-thirty ratio, making you forget (or at least forgive) the backyard-cookout accompaniment of potato chips.

The burger performs another function: it's a familiar standby on a menu that relies on small plates, a great concept in theory (sharing, variety) but one that causes consternation, as small-plate menus are wont to do. (Which ones? How many?) While the choices at General Greene are nearly all satisfactory, some are outstanding, and the challenge is that the same dish, from night to night, can switch categories. A summer-squash salad, laced with pesto, earned raves one evening for its crunch and snap; another night, the flavors were still zippy but the texture was limp; an heirloom-tomato salad once came out as slices of fairly unprepossessing fruit, but a second visit turned up vivid specimens worthy of the name. Some dishes are hard to get wrong, though, and not for nothing do some of the staff's T-shirts read, "Swinevore": pig is a staple, showcased in the dirty rice; the candied bacon; peppery, meaty pork ribs; a creamy, custardy ham-and-Gruyère bread pudding. As befits a local spot, the waiters are friendly and engaging, but ask, ever so casually, for the secret to the chocolate-chip cookies, served warm and gooey, and you'll find that even the most neighborly of restaurants won't share everything. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays for dinner and Saturdays and Sundays for brunch and dinner. Entrées $8-$13.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

HONORE BROWN

READINGS AND TALKS

BARNES & NOBLE
Peter Manseau, the author of the 2005 memoir "Vows: The Story of a Priest, a Nun, and Their Son," reads from his début novel, "Songs for the Butcher's Daughter." (Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 16 at 7.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
The film composers Johnny Mandel ("M*A*S*H," "Being There") and David Shire ("The Taking of Pelham One Two Three," "All the President's Men") and the artist Stan Douglas talk about writing jazz music for the cinema. The critic Gary Giddins is the moderator. (11 W. 53rd St. 212-708-9400. Sept. 17 at 6:30.)

PACE MASTER PRINTS
Janet Abramowicz, the curator of the exhibition "The Etchings of Giorgio Morandi," discusses the work of the Italian artist. (32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3237. Sept. 18 at 6:30.)

"LIVE FROM THE NYPL"
The writer Pico Iyer moderates a discussion between the literary critics Daniel Mendelsohn and James Wood about what it means to be a reader in a world dominated by images. (New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-868-4444. Sept. 17 at 7.)

"READING BURMA"
Orhan Pamuk, Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Siri Hustvedt, George Packer, and other writers commemorate the first anniversary of the Buddhist monks' uprising in Burma and the twentieth anniversary of the civilian pro-democracy protests there. The reading is a benefit for the victims of the Cyclone Nargis. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, 7 E. 7th St. 212-868-4444. Sept. 23 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"STATE BY STATE"
Lately, the people at Powell's Books, in Portland, Oregon, have been making short films about books and authors they like, including Ian McEwan and David Halberstam. The latest work to get this treatment is the new anthology "State by State: A Panoramic Portrait of America." They've created a forty-two-minute film featuring interviews with contributors to the book, which was inspired by the W.P.A. state guides, introduced during the Great Depression. It has its New York première on Sept. 18 at 7 at the Cantor Film Center during an event that includes an introduction by the book's editors, Matt Weiland and Sean Wilsey, and the film's producer, David Weich. Lawrence Weschler, of the New York Institute for the Humanities, will then moderate a discussion with Weiland, Wilsey, and many of the authors in the book, including Charles Bock, Joshua Ferris, Myla Goldberg, Rick Moody, and Ellery Washington. (36 E. 8th St. 212-998-4100.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Asia Week comes to town, and the fall season hits its stride. **Sotheby's** begins with a sale of Chinese ceramics and works of art (Sept. 16), highlighted by a beautiful twenty-two-inch polychrome sculpture of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (in mystical, and sensual, union with his female consort) dating from the Ming dynasty. Contemporary art commandeers the following day (Sept. 17), featuring works by such prized Chinese artists as Cai Guo-Qiang (the director of special effects for the opening and closing ceremonies at the Beijing Olympics), the innovator Yang Jiechang, and Zeng Fanzhi. The focus then moves southward, first to modern and contemporary art from India and Pakistan (Sept. 18) and then to a more classical offering of Indian and South Asian pieces (Sept. 19), which includes an extensive selection of delicately rendered Indian miniatures. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ After auctions of Tibetan and Nepalese art work and Himalayan bronzes (both on Sept. 15), **Christie's** moves on to a sale of Indian and Southeast Asian art (Sept. 16), featuring a vibrant tenth-century Indian bronze figure of Shiva (performing *tandava*, the dance by which the universe is created and destroyed); earlier on the same day, contemporary art from South Asia goes on the block. The house then turns to China (Sept. 17), with snuff bottles from the J&J Collection in the morning, followed by ceramics and works of art. In the day's big evening sale, a select group of fifty-one works from ancient and imperial China, including a group of bronze vessels from the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries B.C., Buddhist sculptures, and exquisite bowls and boxes, are on offer. The week closes with a sale of Japanese and Korean art (Sept. 18), including paintings, hanging scrolls, screens, and ceramics. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ The more diminutive **Doyle** dives in with its own wide-ranging Asian art sale (Sept. 16). It contains a little bit of everything: Chinese jade, porcelain, and pottery; Nepalese gilt bronzes; and Japanese woodblock prints. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)

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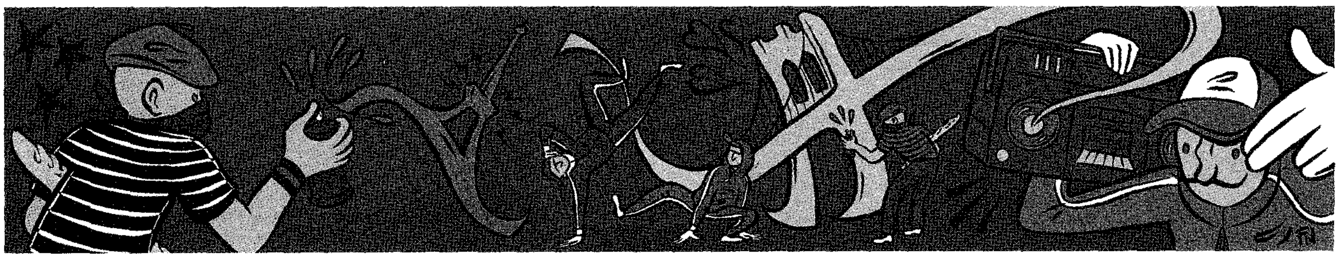
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



FIDO NESTI

Film screenings, graffiti art, and hip-hop dance at the "I Kiffe NY" festival.

ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
GO, BILLY!
Oct. 1

Stephen Daldry's film "Billy Elliot," about a young boy who discovers, to his surprise, a love for dance, was turned into a musical for the West End in 2005, and is still running on the London stage, with music by Elton John and a book and lyrics by Lee Hall. Now comes the Broadway incarnation, at the Imperial, starring David Alvarez, Trent Kowalik, and Kiril Kulish, who will alternate in the title role. Daldry directs. (212-239-6200.)

MOVIES
TOUCHING EXTREMES
Oct. 3-21

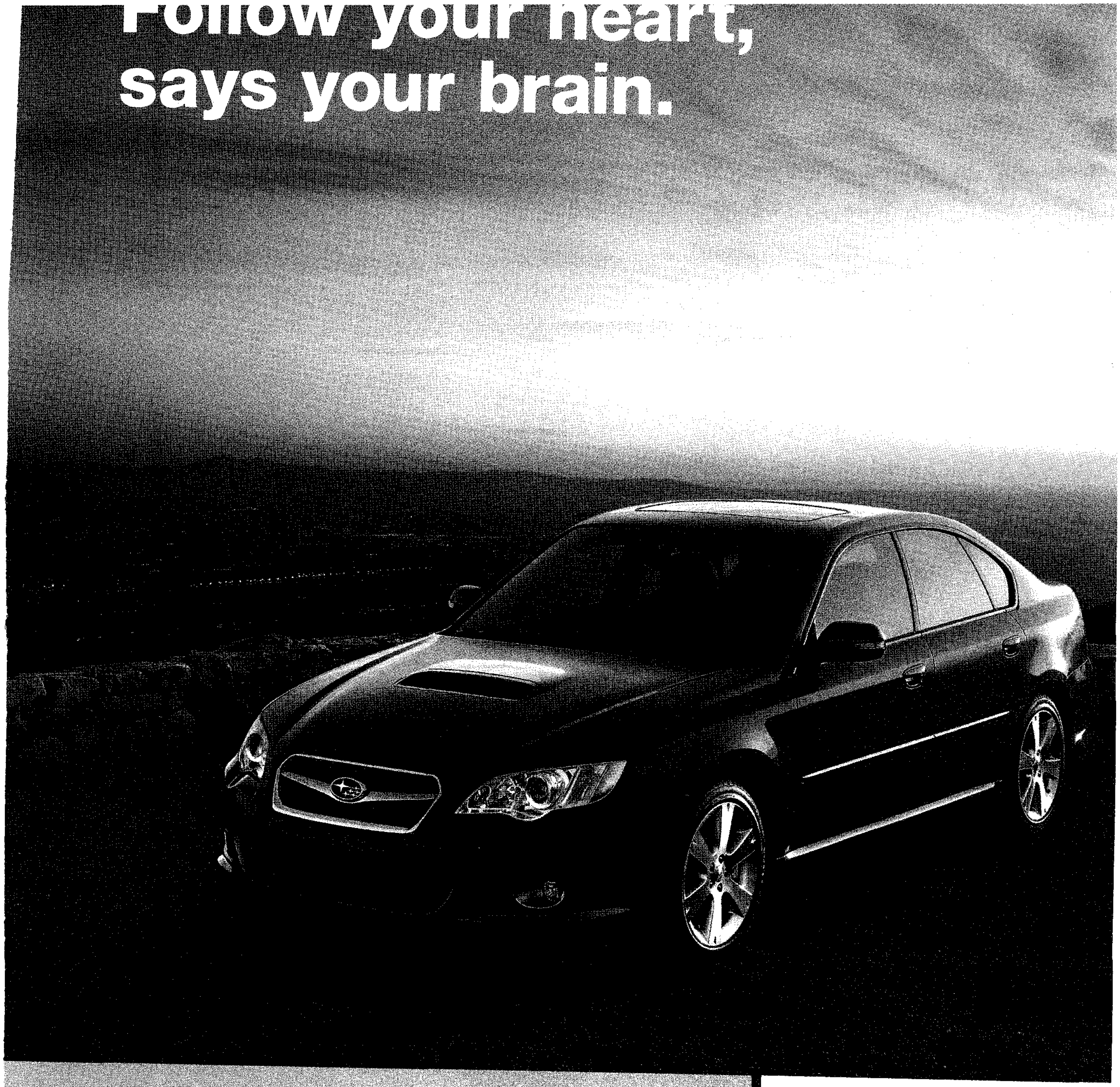
The director, producer, and actor Barbet Schroeder started out working with Eric Rohmer and Jean-Luc Godard in the early sixties. BAM's generous retrospective spans from the 16-mm. anthology series "Six in Paris," from 1965, which he produced, to his documentary "General Idi Amin Dada" and his Hollywood movies ("Reversal of Fortune," "Barfly"). His new erotic horror thriller, "Inju, the Beast in the Shadow," will also be screened. (718-636-4100.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
CAN YOU DIG IT?
Oct. 6-28

The "I Kiffe NY" festival, which is chaired by the actor Vincent Cassel and the filmmaker Melvin Van Peebles, puts the urban culture of France on center stage, with a broad program that includes screenings of contemporary French films, exhibitions by graffiti-inspired artists, and performances around town by the sensual Afro-Continental duo Les Nubians, the championship French hip-hop dance company Pockemon Crew, and others. (www.frenchculture.org.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
FILL 'ER UP
Oct. 14 and Oct. 16-18

The avant-garde string quartet Ethel has long been an integral part of the downtown scene. Now, they're so downtown that they've decamped to Brooklyn. BAM presents them in "TruckStop," an evening of music theatre that features collaborations with a variety of American folk musicians. (718-636-4100.)



Whether rationally or emotionally, the Legacy just makes sense. Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive gives you a firm grip on the road. A 243-horsepower engine means plenty of go. With available stability control, the Legacy is even a 2008 IIHS Top Safety Pick.* Go on, follow your heart and your head. **Love. It's what makes a Subaru, a Subaru.**

SUBARU

VIETNAM
STYLE, COURTESY OF THE BRAZILIANS

And which of the myriad garment factories in Vietnam is manufacturing this season's sensation in the trendy shopping districts? None of them. It's actually produced by two guys in a back yard in Rio de Janeiro – over 10,000 miles away. Sometimes business success can strike in unexpected places, even on the other side of the world. Shouldn't you be with a bank that's got it all covered?

Your business success is out there. Is your bank?

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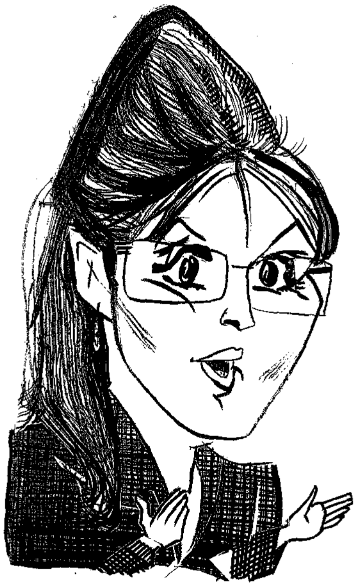
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE GET

David Westin has served as the president of ABC News for about eleven years. He oversees the journalism of "Nightline," "World News with Charles Gibson," and "20/20." The Walt Disney Company owns ABC, however, and, at times, Westin has seemed to struggle to police the foggy border between news and entertainment. For example, in 2000—two Presidential-election cycles ago—he permitted the actor Leonardo DiCaprio to film a talk with President Clinton, to commemorate Earth Day. After this decision attracted criticism, on the ground that it was a perversion of journalism, Westin wrote an e-mail to colleagues in which he denied that he had ever regarded the program as an "interview." It couldn't have been, because having movie stars conduct interviews would be a violation of professional journalistic standards, and "no one is that stupid." In a joking aside, Westin added, "All roles of journalists must be played by journalists (duh!)."

Last week on ABC, the role of the journalist was played by a journalist, but otherwise it was on with the show. The network's headliner was Governor Sarah Palin, of Alaska, the Republican Party's nominee for Vice-President of the United States. For fourteen days following her nomination, on August 29th, the Governor had appeared at no press conferences and had granted no interviews. (During her media purdah, Senator Joseph Biden, the Democratic Party's nominee for Vice-President, gave fifty-four interviews or press conferences.) Finally, after negotiations, Palin agreed to receive Gibson in her home state, and to answer his questions. In lavish promotional advertisements, ABC referred to this exclusive as "the interview everybody has been waiting for." The double-entendre was as close as Westin came to acknowledging his collaboration with the McCain campaign's decision to sequester Palin until the potent anniversary date of September 11th; on that day, Palin's eldest son, a recent Army enlistee, deployed for Iraq at a brigade departure ceremony, an event captured by ABC's cameras, for broadcast on the evening news.



There is no shame in winning an exclusive interview with a reclusive subject, of course, and David Westin is hardly responsible for the McCain campaign's cynical handling of its Eliza Doolittle problem, but if he had managed his network's "get" more responsibly he might have expelled its odor of compromise. The occasion of the Alaska governor's début before the national media called for a lightly edited, extended one-on-one, aired on a single night, so that American voters might assess the candidate's answers and demeanor in full. Instead, apparently to maximize ratings and branding opportunities, ABC doled out Palin sound bites on six network broadcasts over two days, as well as in supplemental ABC Radio and Web releases. In the end, Westin exploited the Governor's moose-hunting, baby-juggling appeal as if she were a magnetic contestant on one of the network's prime-time reality shows—"Extreme Makeover: White House Edition."

By now, perhaps, it is quixotic to express disenchantment about the celebrity narratives—the "personal stories"—that dominate American politics. After all, John McCain selected Palin only because he was searching for a counter to Barack Obama's own tele-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

vision-lit charisma juggernaut. Still, as it turns out, not all pop idols are equally prepared to lead a nuclear-armed nation.

Palin's answers to Gibson's questions made it clear that all the briefings and all the cramming that she could absorb in two weeks were not enough to endow her with what her résumé so plainly indicated that she lacked: sufficient exposure to national-security issues to serve as President, should she be required to do so. She confirmed that she has never been abroad, apart from visits to Canada and Mexico, and a recent trip "that changed my life" to Kuwait and Germany, where she met American soldiers. She also said that she has never had occasion to meet a foreign head of state. She added, a little defensively, "If you go back in history and if you ask that question of many Vice-Presidents, they may have the same answer."

Perhaps she was thinking of the antebellum period. Since the dawn of the atomic age, of the thirty-one other Vice-Presidential candidates nominated by both major political parties, perhaps only Spiro Agnew, a governor of Maryland, had comparably scant exposure to the world beyond the United States at the time of his selection. However, Agnew did earn a Bronze Star during military service in France and Germany during the Second World War. (His Vice-Presidency ended with his resignation, in 1973—something to do with bribery payments, handed over in brown paper bags.)

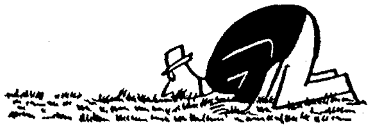
Palin is a natural orator, and in television interviews granted before she became a nominee for national office she came across as relaxed, funny, and self-possessed. In the ABC sessions, she told Gibson that when McCain invited her to join his ticket, "I didn't hesitate. . . . You can't blink. . . . I didn't blink." Palin leaned forward, radiating nervous energy. Gibson, with his large frame, sonorous voice, and reading glasses perched low on his nose, loomed over his subject, presenting an unfortunate image of male professorial condescension as he ticked through foreign-policy issues that he clearly knew better than Palin did. Even so, the Governor's anxious-sounding answers to his questions produced more than enough awkward moments to justify McCain's decision to hold her back for study hall. Palin seemed uncertain, for example, about the meaning of the Bush Doctrine, which has laid out the most important changes in American defense policy since the end of the Cold War. She sounded a little nonchalant, too, when Gibson pointed out that her advocacy of membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for the small Caucasus state of Georgia might lead the United States into war with Russia, which is a nuclear-armed state. "Perhaps so," Palin said.

The Governor spoke with transparent ease, however, about God and drilling for oil. Gibson played an excerpt from a video clip of an appearance Palin made in June of this year at the Wasilla Assembly of God, the Pentecostal church to which she belonged for twenty-six years, until 2002. The full fifteen-minute video, which is available on YouTube, provides a flavor of the evangelical environment that has shaped what Palin calls her "world view." She told the congregation, of her efforts to build a gas pipeline across Alaska, "I think God's will has to be done in unifying people and companies to get that gas line built—so pray for that." The pastor leading the service then predicted to Palin that Alaska would become "one of the refuge states in the last days," a place that would have to minister to thousands of Christians arriving from the Lower Forty-eight for the Rapture. Palin remarked that when she travels to Christian churches around Alaska, and is warned that a particular service might involve the raising of hands or other intense expressions of Christian devotion, she is able to say that she has seen it all: "I grew up at the Wasilla Assembly of God—nothing freaks me out about the worship service."

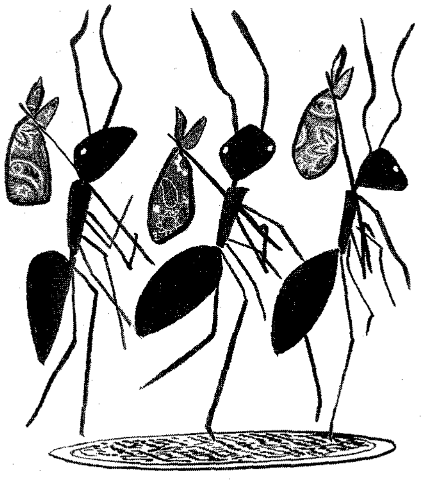
Diversity of religious belief is an American strength, and none of Palin's statements remotely disqualify her from national office. Still, the YouTube version of the Governor's idiosyncratic narrative of faith, ambition, motherhood, and frontier life has a slightly different ring from the received version, which débuted at the Republican Convention last month; the video does not evoke "Northern Exposure" so much as it does "There Will Be Blood." There are about fifty days left until a national election of unusual consequence; perhaps there is still time for journalists to fully vet what McCain did not.

—*Steve Coll*

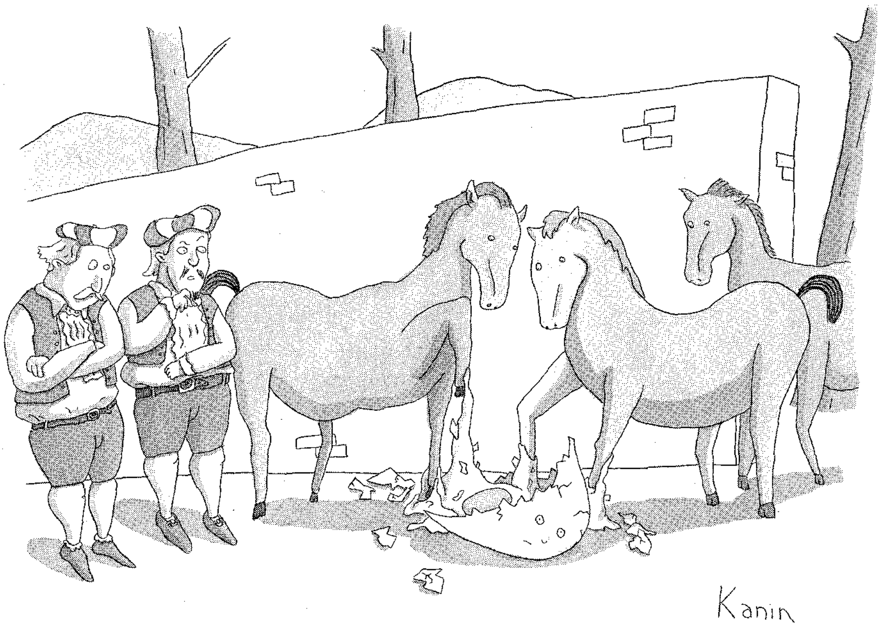
FIELD NOTES
ONE BY ONE



If people, viewed from a great height, look like ants, do ants, viewed at close range, look like people? Of course not. Ants have six legs, compound eyes, no lungs, and impossibly narrow waists, and they tend to hang around with aphids and mealybugs. Still, behavioral similarities make them excellent analogues. Ants, like humans, are into career specialization, livestock herding, engineering, climate control, in-flight sex, and war; for them, as for us, free will may or may not be an illusion. As for whether ants look to humans for insight into themselves, science has no answer.



A few years ago, Marko Pecarevic, a Croatian graduate student studying conservation biology at Columbia University, met with his adviser, the urban ecologist James Danoff-Burg, to come up with a subject for his master's thesis. Danoff-Burg had some data on ants in city parks and wondered if Pecarevic wanted to work on that. Pecarevic thought not. But afterward, crossing



"Funny—all the king's horses don't seem to be helping at all."

• •

Broadway, he saw ants crawling around a garbage bin on one of the avenue's medians. Medians! As habitats, the planted medians of Broadway were ubiquitous but overlooked, suitably biodiverse but extraordinarily distressed. For someone interested, as Pecarevic was, in the ecology of heavily compromised urban environments, medians were like remote, unexplored island chains—a Galápagos in Manhattan. He decided to be their Darwin. Employing Google Earth (forgive him, he's from Zagreb), he chose three median-rich stretches—Park Avenue, the West Side Highway, and Broadway—then made himself an official-looking ID, dressed in parkish green, and started collecting ants, travelling the city with a duffelbag of garden tools and Evian bottles filled with antifreeze. No one bothered him.

On a recent afternoon, Pecarevic, a trim, wry thirty-two-year-old, went out on a survey of his medians. For demonstration purposes, he had cadged a plastic cup from a coffeeshop, and pocketed a spoon. He carried, as he always does, an aspirator, a plastic tube that he uses to collect ants. He inhales them, alive, into a chamber. "Sometimes, when you suck up ants, they're not happy about it," he said. "If you blow cigarette smoke on them, they calm down." Really, this was a farewell tour—he was returning to Zagreb the next day, to pursue a doctorate. His thesis ("Ant Diversity and Abundance Increase with Increasing Plant Complexity and Amount of Garbage Bins in New York City Street Medians") was done, and he was bequeathing to New York some interesting conclusions about its ants.

For example, ants seem to have an astute sense of neighborhood stereotypes. The Upper West Side, as it happens, is more diverse, ant-wise, than the Upper East Side. Diversity is a function of habitat, and habitat, on the medians, is reflective of the people who live around them. As you might expect, Park Avenue medians contain fewer garbage cans (the greatest determinants of ant variety and abundance) and less complex flora; they are more manicured, less riotous. "On some parts of Broadway, it doesn't look like anyone's been there for years," Pecarevic said. Ants like that.

Pecarevic surmised that ants got from one median to another mostly via intercourse. A queen and a male, both winged, mate in the air—the nuptial flight, as it's known. The male dies, and the female, alighting in a new place, starts a colony. One mating session provides her with enough ant sperm to last a lifetime; she can produce an egg every few seconds for the rest of her life. (This arrangement holds on both sides of Central Park, so we should infer nothing about the connubial difficulties of 10021 versus those of 10024.)

To collect the ants, Pecarevic had also laid pitfall traps, three per median. These were clear plastic cups dug into the dirt, and partly filled with antifreeze. The ants fell in and died quickly, before they could dismember one another. He left the traps for three days. To warn off maintenance crews, he had affixed tiny signs to toothpicks, which he stuck in the ground. After emptying the traps, he spent three minutes around each one, sucking up live ants with the aspirator. Back home, he poured the antifreeze through a colander, over the toilet. He washed and preserved the ants in alcohol. Over the course of two years, he had collected six thousand six hundred and nineteen ants, from forty-four medians, and identified fourteen species.

There are roughly twelve thousand known species of ant. The three most common, on the medians, were, in ascending order, the cornfield ant, the thief ant, and, from Europe, the pavement ant. "If you see an ant walking on pavement, it's probably a pavement ant," Pecarevic said. Also, if you see ants fighting on the pavement. "They have huge fights. They bite each other."

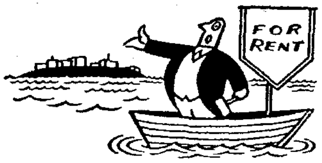
The day was hot and hazy—maybe not so good for anting. On the median at Seventy-fourth Street, on Broadway, Pecarevic turned up spoonfuls of earth and sifted through them, as though digging for steamers. Nothing. Ants: never there when you need them. On Seventy-sixth Street, he found a colony of pavement ants in some rotting wood bordering a flower bed. They ran wild over a Popsicle stick, a plastic spoon, pistachio nuts, Marlboro butts, and degraded credit-card receipts. No fighting and biting today. On Park Avenue, south of Seventy-ninth, he prowled a begonia bed and a bit of parched lawn, under some cherry trees. Antless.

Two summers ago, on Broadway, north of 100th Street, Pecarevic discovered a species that had previously never been found north of Virginia, the Chinese needle ant, an invasive predator with a powerful sting. He'd found four of them—a colony, perhaps. He went back again last summer, but the needle ants were gone. He theorized that the cold winter had wiped them out. "I was hoping to find more," he said. "It would have been nice to get some funding for more research." There will be ants in Zagreb.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

DEPT. OF REPURPOSING

VACANCY



One recent morning, Joseph McKinsey sat on the porch of the Ram's Head Inn, on Shelter Island, and laid out his vision for transforming the grounds into a high-end rehab center. McKinsey, sixty-three, an Amagansett-based businessman who made a fortune in computer products, sees an opportunity in the bifurcated landscape of rehabs. The West Coast establishments resemble luxury hotels. The best known—like Promises and Passages, both in Malibu; Cirque Lodge, in Sundance, Utah; and Cottonwood de Tucson, in Arizona—offer such amenities as one-on-one therapy sessions and personal gyms. At the East Coast's better-known rehab centers, such as Silver Hill, in Connecticut, and the Caron Foundation, in Pennsylvania, the grounds are comfortable, in a vaguely collegiate way, but there is a no-frills aesthetic. McKinsey's idea is to create a West Coast-style rehab center in the East—a place where New York City addicts can come to recover, without having to fly. The Safe Harbor Retreat, as he was calling it, would be a twenty-two-bed facility, charging thirty-six thousand dollars for a month's stay, offering many of the comforts that Promises promises, McKinsey said, but "within a more traditional, Betty Ford-style approach."

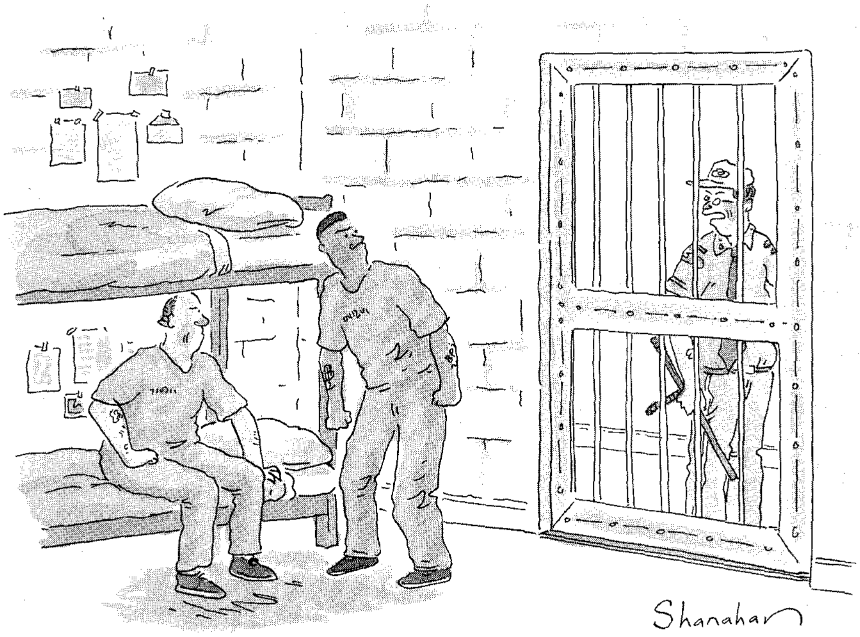
McKinsey continued, "You'd have hiking, sailing, kayaking, tennis, just as there is now." He gestured around the grounds and said, "You'd have the same kind of people—you could walk in here and see a group of alcoholics and a group of regular customers, and you wouldn't know the difference. And, instead of having ten thousand people a year coming through, including large and noisy weddings, filling the roads with drivers who may have had a few drinks, you would have two hundred and sixty-four people in a year, who wouldn't have cars."

McKinsey, who noted that he was in his twenty-fourth year, seventh month, and seventh day of sobriety, wore a light-blue linen shirt, khakis, and brown woven loafers with no socks. He explained that, last year, he had read in the newspaper that the Ram's Head Inn was for sale, for seventeen and a half million dollars, and realized that it was perfect—secluded, beautiful, comfortable, and on an island, which all the experts he had talked with thought was key psychologically. ("Once you step on that ferry, you are going to a different place.") He explored the option of buying it, but couldn't get the money together, so he made a deal with the owners, James and Linda Eklund, to lease the buildings and the grounds for five years.

McKinsey's only remaining hurdle was to convince the community that a rehab center would be a good thing for Ram Island, a lovely, leafy knob of land reached via causeway from Shelter Island. That evening, he was planning to attend a zoning-board hearing to appeal the board's decision that the rehab center constituted a "change of use" in the facility, and therefore needed a special permit in order to go forward. So far, local property owners had been hostile to the idea. All residents of Shelter Island had received a mailing urging them to attend the meeting. "People were saying the place would be crawling with addicts," McKinsey said, "and because it's on the water"—he gestured out toward the harbor—"they would bring the drugs in by boat, and you would have drug-addicted children in the streets."

That evening, McKinsey arrived at the hearing, in the auditorium of the Shelter Island School, with a small entourage of lawyers and an addiction specialist, and sat in the front row. The three-hundred-seat auditorium filled up fast. The attendees were mostly older people, in vaguely nautical garb, and they were in a mood to rumble.

The first of McKinsey's lawyers, Mariann Wang, was greeted with a low hiss from the crowd. She argued that since the new facility will be used for the same purpose as the hotel, except for the fact that the occupants are disabled, it would be discriminatory for the zoning board to try to block it. "Such an adverse action taken solely because of the involvement of individuals with disabilities would be plainly unlawful under anti-discrimination laws," she said. Her sally was met with laughter and shouts of disbelief from the crowd.



"Hey, guys—inside voices."

Then another of McKinsey's lawyers, John J. Bennett, got up and argued that a rehab center is basically the same as a hotel, because it is "a facility catering to transient residents, for general public use." Since the same thing could be said about a brothel, this didn't win over the residents, either. Bennett then argued that in blocking McKinsey from creating his rehab center the board would deny him the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This brought shouts of open disdain.

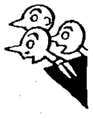
"Now I know how Custer felt," McKinsey said recently. A week later, he withdrew the appeal. He's hoping, now, to obtain a "change of use" permit, which would allow him to proceed with his plans. Reflecting on the hearing, he said, "I could have packed the audience with my community—people from A.A. But that's not how we do things."

—*John Seabrook*

DOUBLE HELIX DEPT.

PTOOEY!

A Rockefeller



Certain innovations—cell phones, the umbrella—started out as symbols of wealth before trickling down to the masses. Getting to know your genotype may be next on the list. In 2006, Linda Avey and Anne Wojcicki founded a company called 23andMe (that's chromosome pairs), which gives its customers the chance to decode their genes. For four hundred dollars, you spit into a vial and mail it to a lab, where the DNA is extracted and put on a chip that can analyze about six hundred thousand sections of your genome. A few weeks later, you sign in online and get the biotech equivalent of a psychic reading.

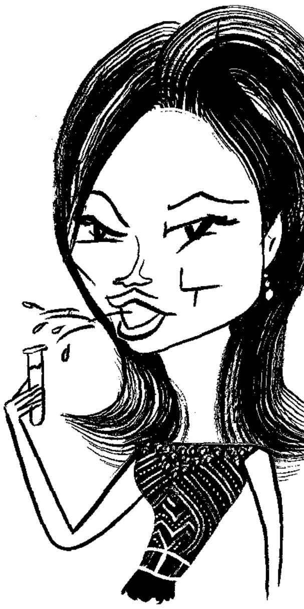
"We thought, Let's do something radical," Wojcicki said last Tuesday, in the lobby of the IAC Building, where the company was about to throw a Spit Party, hosted by Barry Diller, Rupert Murdoch, Harvey Weinstein, and their genetically gifted wives. The concept, she said, has major implications for the field of personalized medicine. "It's very useful if you know that you're at increased risk for deep-vein thrombosis and you're on a plane," she continued. "You might want to stay vigilant about moving around." Instead of finding out the hard way that their children are allergic to peanuts, parents may someday be able to test their DNA. Even small inherited traits, Avey added, can serve as health clues: "There is some correlation between your ability to metabolize caffeine and your risk for a heart attack."

Of course, the news isn't all dire. "There's a gene called α-actinin-3, and a version of it is found in people who excel at sprinting," Avey said, adding that she doesn't have α-actinin-3 but Wojcicki does. Recently, the company has begun surveying its customers about their hereditary quirks (freckles, sneezing when exposed to the sun, the ability to smell asparagus in one's urine) and plotting them against genetic data. There are also genealogical revelations. "My dad is Polish Catholic, but he has a Y chromosome that is very common in Jewish populations," Wojcicki said. And there are two types of earwax—wet and dry—the latter of which is prevalent among Asians. Avey's father-in-law, who is of northern European heritage, has it, too. "Was it a Genghis Khan thing? I don't know," she said.

Avey and Wojcicki were joined by Wendi Murdoch, Rupert's wife, who had already taken her DNA test. "I did it," she said. "My children did it. Rupert's mom did it. She's ninety-nine years old!" She logged on to a laptop near the cheese table and pulled up a profile of her inherited traits, such as alcohol-flush reaction. "My daughter has that, too," she said. "But Rupert doesn't. He can drink, but he won't get red."

As the room filled up, it was tempting to view genetics as a great equalizer. Wojcicki's husband, Sergey Brin, who was moonlighting as a party photographer, may have co-founded Google, but, as he pointed out, he can't make a clover with his tongue. "I can move my ears pretty well," he said, wiggling enthusiastically. Barry Diller, who was still awaiting his test results ("Obviously, my spit was very, very complex"), was asked if there was anything he didn't like about his genetic makeup. "Oh, where would we start?" he said. On the question of whether he could smell asparagus in his urine, Harvey Weinstein had no comment.

The technology is evolving rapidly, but so far there is no evidence of a captain-of-industry gene. Nevertheless, Chevy Chase, standing near the coat check, observed that moguls have certain traits in common. "Shortness," he said. "And an elevated sense of self-esteem." Chase (yes to tongue-curling, no to peanut allergy) had not yet taken the 23andMe test, but there was one thing that he dreaded finding out: "That I'm related to Barry Diller."



Wendi Murdoch

Over at the Spit Lounge, a father-and-son pair of financiers, both of Eastern European Jewish descent, were purchasing genetics kits. "I've been told that we look alike physically—our facial reactions, our eyes," the son, David, said. His father, Stan, was with his wife, an Anglo-Saxon, who preferred to spit at home. The men put the vials to their lips and started dribbling. "This is hard," Stan said.

"Think of lemons!" a 23andMe coach urged him.

When David's vial was about two tablespoons full, he capped it, shook it, and sealed it in an envelope. He was more excited than nervous about the results. "I try not to worry about what I can't control," he said. In one area, though, he felt that genetics had failed him: "my hairline." It was observed that his father still had a full head of hair. "I know," he said. "I got a bum deal."

—*Michael Schulman*

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LETTER FROM MOSCOW

ECHO IN THE DARK

A radio station strives to keep the airwaves free.

BY DAVID REMNICK

In the land of the Soviets, the voice of the Kremlin was everywhere, an omnipresent reality-via-radio that long preceded Orwell's dystopia. Lenin and Trotsky fomented revolution primarily in print—in the commanding editorials of *Iskra* and *Pravda*, in the frenzied leaflets passed around in St. Petersburg meeting halls and later reprinted in "Ten Days That Shook the World"—but the leading instrument of enculturation and inundation under Joseph Stalin was a broadcast technology called *radio-tochka*, literally "radio point," a primitive receiver with no dial and no choice. These cheap wood-framed devices were installed in apartments and hallways, on factory floors, in train stations and bus depots; they played in hospitals, nursing homes, and military barracks; they were nailed to poles in the fields of collective farms and blared along the beaches from the Baltic to the Sea of Okhotsk.

The radio day commenced at 6 A.M. First, the Soviet anthem, then "*Govorit Moskva* . . ." ("Moscow speaking").

If someone in a communal apartment shut off the radio, he was considered suspect, defiant, a potential "enemy of the people." The broadcasts issued the edicts of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, announced the details of the Five-Year Plan, declared the latest triumph of the Soviet Army and the perfidies of the capitalist West. In addition to the news, there was classical music and readings of classical Russian literature, along with "radio meetings" of village workers and soldiers' mothers. The Soviet people rarely heard Stalin's actual voice—halting, dry, with a thick Georgian accent—but through the radio they absorbed his pronouncements, his view of culture and the world, his implicit message of paternalism and threat. It is hard to imagine now the totality of the instrument and the perverse imagination required to conceive it, but *radio-tochka* existed for decades, as present as water and electricity and twice as reliable. It was such a successful tool of propaganda that when, in 1942, Hitler visited occupied Ukraine he expressed his admiration for Stalin's methodology and bemoaned the fact that the German people were still listening to shortwave broadcasts from the BBC.

With Stalin's death, in 1953, and the liberalizing thaw under Khrushchev, the Soviet radio dial eventually expanded to include Radio Mayak (Lighthouse) and Radio Yunost (Youth). Mayak's and Yunost's programming was slightly less rigid in tone and more open to popular music, though the ideology was no less reflective of the Kremlin line. For the next three decades, the Soviet regime took great care to jam the Russian-language broadcasts of the BBC, the Voice of America, Radio Liberty, and Deutsche Welle. Jamming was an ongoing battle between state and subject. Especially in the sixties and seventies, urban intellectuals typically committed their first anti-Soviet act by purchasing a decent radio—either a Soviet Latvian-made Spidola or, if possible, a German-made Grundig—and attempting to listen to the "foreign voices." They would try anything to catch an aural glimpse of the world beyond, turning the radio sideways or upside down to get a signal or sticking the antennas out the window; better yet, they escaped from the big cities to the surrounding dacha communities, where the jamming was less effective. The fortunate listener caught some foreign news on Deutsche Welle, the Beatles on the BBC, Willis Conover's famous jazz broadcasts on VOA.

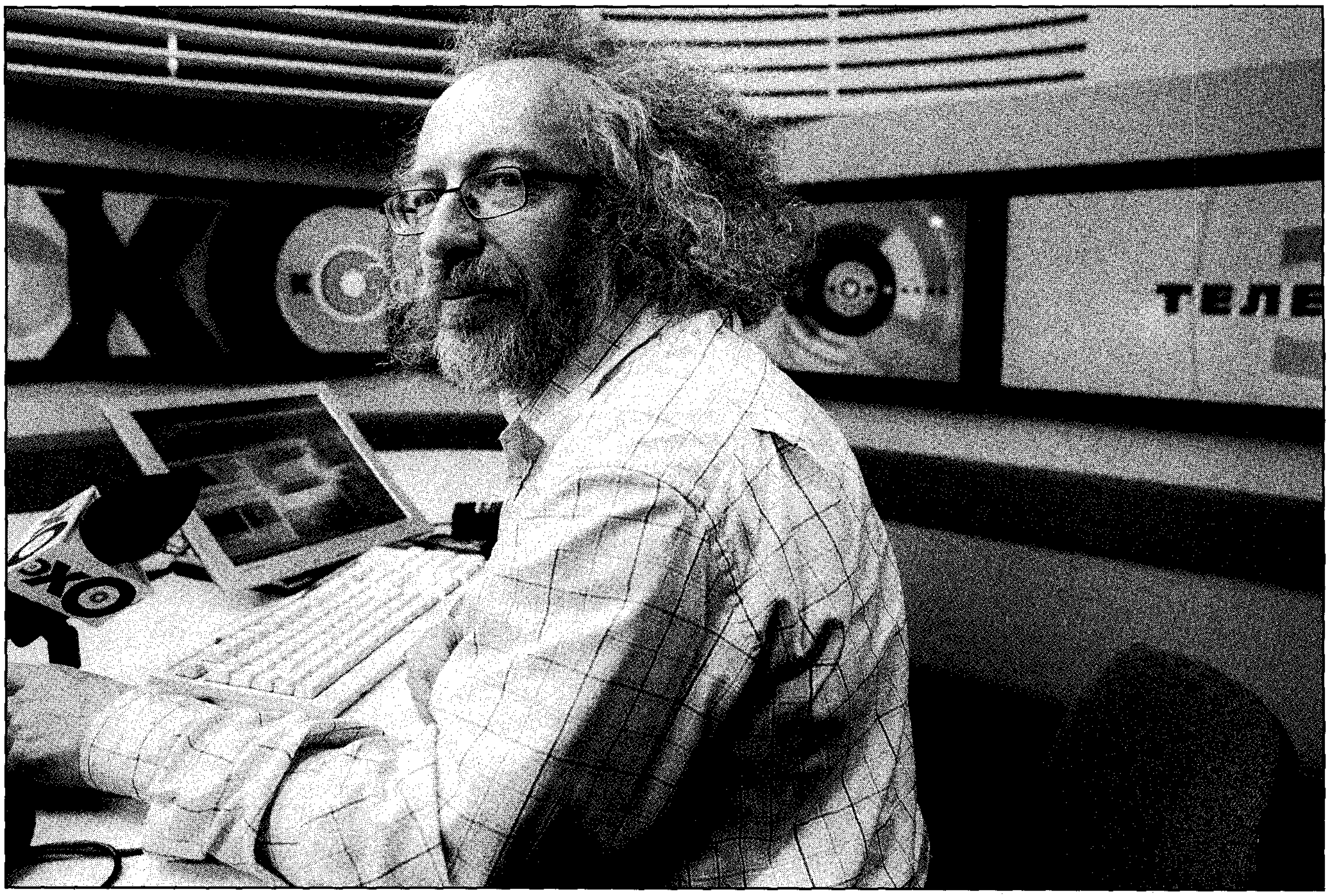
"We would even listen to Vatican radio, which would give you a good report on what was happening in the Soviet Union, and you didn't care that the announcer would then add 'God bless you,'" the historian Sergei Ivanov said.

When the Soviet Army invaded Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968, Soviet vacationers listened to news of the events on the beaches of the Baltic sea. The political analyst Masha Lipman, who is married to Ivanov, was in Lithuania at the time, and she recalled, "That summer on the beach, antennas were shooting up all over the place. And, in our circles, when you said that you heard about it 'on the radio' it meant only one thing—that you'd heard it on the Russian-language broadcasts of the VOA, the BBC, or Deutsche Welle." In those circles, there was also a popular rhyme: "*Est' obychai na Rusi—noch'iu slishat' Bi-bi-si.*" ("There's a custom in Russia—at night we listen to the BBC.") At a meeting of the Central Committee's presidium in 1963, Khrushchev pleaded, "Let's . . . figure out a solution so that we produce radio sets that work only for the reception of our stations." But, according to Kristin Roth-Ey, a specialist on Soviet-era media at University College, London, nothing ever came of Khrushchev's ambition.

Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power, in 1985, and the institution of his policy of glasnost ended the jamming of foreign radio. Newspapers, literary magazines, theatre, television, and film flourished under the new freedoms, and, in broadcasting, Radio Liberty was permitted to open a bureau in Moscow—a vivid sign that the old taboos were falling away and Russia was fitfully joining the world.

In 1990, a few refugees from Soviet radio decided to start a station in the capital that would combine straightforward news, discussion, and even call-in shows that allowed people to say precisely what they wanted—a plan that might seem a banality elsewhere. The founders called the station Ekho Moskvy, Echo of Moscow, and they set up shop in a tiny, overheated single-room studio situated just a couple of blocks from Red Square. Echo went on the air on August 22, 1990, with an extended news program, including an interview with one of the young leaders of the Moscow reformers, Sergei Stankevich, and then played the Beatles song "All My Loving."

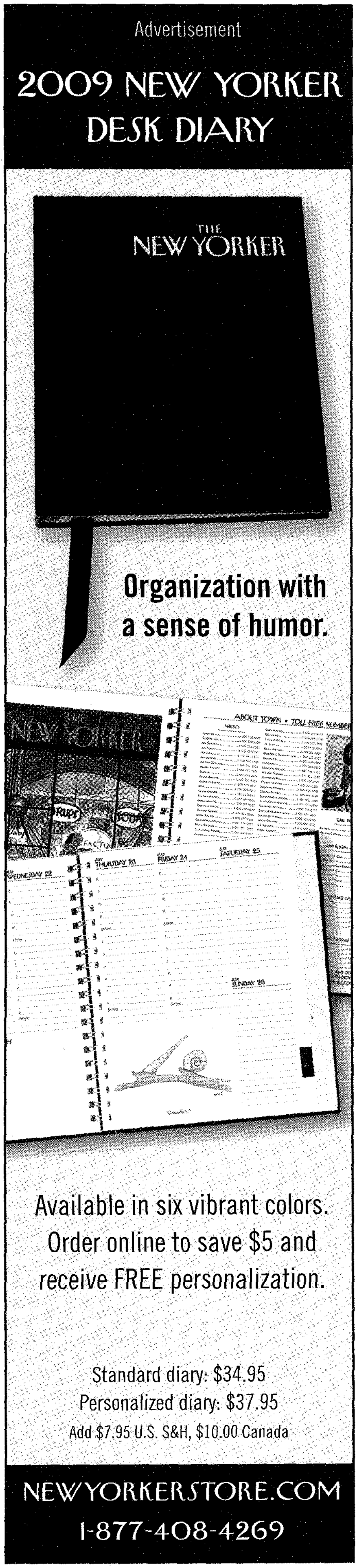
At the time, Echo of Moscow seemed merely part of the greater phenomenon of expanding press freedoms, the logical outgrowth of a movement spurred by the Kremlin leadership. Now, eighteen years later, in the authoritarian ecosystem of Vladimir Putin, Echo of Moscow is one of the last of an endangered species, a dodo that still roams the earth.



Aleksei Venediktov in the Echo of Moscow studios. He told Putin, "I can't restrain myself from doing what we are here to do."

ALEX REMNICK

Since Echo of Moscow was founded, I've been a frequent visitor to its studios. It's a matter of reporting convenience; if you hang out there long enough, you are bound to run into all kinds of interesting people. If there is an important event in the capital—an election, an uprising, a passing scandal, a war in the Caucasus—the principals, the wised-up commentators, and the partisans invariably gravitate to the fourteenth floor of 11 Novy Arbat Street. In New York, whenever I want to get caught up on events in Russia, I go to Echo's Web site, echo.msk.ru, and listen



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either to a live broadcast or to podcasts of interviews and discussion shows.

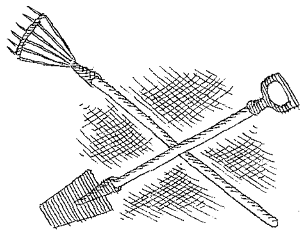
Not long ago, I found myself listening late into the night to Sergei Parkhomenko, who is the former editor of a few Yeltsin-era publications, as he conducted an interview with one Vladimir Kvachkov. An ex-military-intelligence officer, Kvachkov was accused three years ago of conspiring to assassinate Anatoly Chubais, who is despised by most Russians for his role in the rapid privatization of industries and land during the Yeltsin era. At the trial, prosecutors charged that Kvachkov had conspired to plant a roadside bomb that blew up as Chubais's BMW rolled past it. The car was armored—Russian billionaires spend their money wisely as well as freely—and Chubais survived. In court, Kvachkov denied any part in the plot but made little secret of his hatred. In his view, Chubais is part of a "foreign occupying force" trying to destroy Russia from within. Kvachkov, who was acquitted, brazenly told Parkhomenko that "you can't kill a person, but you must eliminate the enemy."

During the war in Georgia and South Ossetia, an event that seemed to portend a potential renewal of the Cold War, Echo of Moscow broadcast sober, balanced accounts from battlefield reporters on a show called "With Their Own Eyes." There were many discussion shows, too, with guests ranging from the journalist Maksim Shevchenko, who waved the extreme-nationalist banner, to a severe critic of the Kremlin, Andrei Illarionov, who was an economic adviser to Putin in his first term as President. Putin was not amused by Echo's rounded coverage of the war. On August 29th, he summoned thirty-five of the country's leading media executives to his vacation compound, in Sochi. In the past eight years, Putin has regularly held such meetings—sometimes to give his political point of view, and sometimes to admonish, but always to make clear who is in charge. And that, evidently, has not changed with the election of a new head of state, Dmitry Medvedev.

At the meeting in Sochi, Putin turned his attention—and his icy glare—to Aleksei Venediktov, the editor-in-chief of Echo of Moscow, criticizing the station for its broadcasts about Georgia. Many of the loyalist editors in the room were delighted as they watched Putin rough up Venediktov on a range of editorial and factual points. Not for the first time, there was the sense that Putin might shut down the station. Later, in a hallway, Venediktov protested to Putin that he was being "unjust." Putin pulled out a stack of transcripts to underline his points, saying, "You have to answer for this, Aleksei Alekseevich!" Venediktov was shaken, but he calculated that Putin would never have invited him to Sochi with the rest of the delegation had he intended to get rid of him or Echo of Moscow. That could have been accomplished with a telephone call.

"Afterward, we met one on one, and there Putin's tone was more positive," Venediktov told me. "But he made his point. He was demonstrating his ability to do whatever he wants with us at any time." When Venediktov returned to Moscow, he made clear to his staff that they had best "pay careful attention" to their coverage, be sure of their facts, and get sufficient government views. But no one was fired, and it was clear that he had managed to escape the worst. "*Poka*," Venediktov said. "For now."

The founders of Echo, including Sergei Buntman, Sergei Korzun, and Yuri Fedutinov, were radio professionals who had spent their twenties working on various Soviet stations and, when they had the chance to go abroad, studying the way things were done in the West. Glasnost gave them their opening. In his youth, Buntman had also run a theatre program at Moscow's School No. 875, where he worked with Venediktov, a history teacher of unusual intelligence and self-possession. At the time, journalists were still struggling with the old ideological inhibitions, and so Buntman, recognizing a peer with a deep interest in politics and a restless curiosity, hired Venediktov as a reporter, though he had not had five minutes of journalistic experience. Eventually, Venediktov became



the station's editor-in-chief and leading public figure.

Venediktov is a standard-issue type of the Russian intelligentsia, with thick glasses, a wry, knowing manner, and frizzy Bozo the Clown hair. As an interviewer, he is as aggressive as the young Mike Wallace, but a great deal more cerebral. As an analyst, he is incisive and cocky, well satisfied that all his predictions will, or have, come true. More important, he has been an extremely adept politician when it comes to fending off the complaints and demands of the Kremlin and protecting his reporters. The walls of the Echo studios are covered with photographs of the dignitaries who have come to be interviewed, and Venediktov seems undaunted by all of them. Many of his questions begin with chesty prodding: "*Kak eto mozhet byt'* "—"How can it possibly be . . . ?" When Bill Clinton went on too long with an answer, Venediktov kicked him under the table.

As a novice reporter, Venediktov proved to be brave yet untheatrical. In August, 1991, during the K.G.B.-led coup, he stayed inside the parliament building, the Russian White House, with Boris Yeltsin and his defenders, while the building was surrounded by tanks. He returned to the Russian White House in October, 1993, when Yeltsin ordered the shelling of the building, which had been occupied by the so-called "Red-Brown coalition" of Communists and nationalists. During that uprising, Yeltsin's rebellious Vice-President, Aleksandr Rutskoi, borrowed Venediktov's telephone and used it to call on Russian Air Force pilots to bomb the Kremlin, and Echo of Moscow aired Rutskoi's tirade. The Red-Brown rebellion was eventually suppressed and Rutskoi imprisoned. Two months later, a group of reporters, including Venediktov, was invited to a meeting with Yeltsin. Usually, the reporters were seated around the table in alphabetical order, but now Venediktov realized that he was seated directly across from Yeltsin, who was bound to be furious at Echo. Yeltsin, an enormous man with a stevedore's chest and a party-boss temperament, strode into the room and angrily addressed Venediktov: "Echo of Moscow, you should be ashamed of yourselves!" he said. " 'Comrades, the

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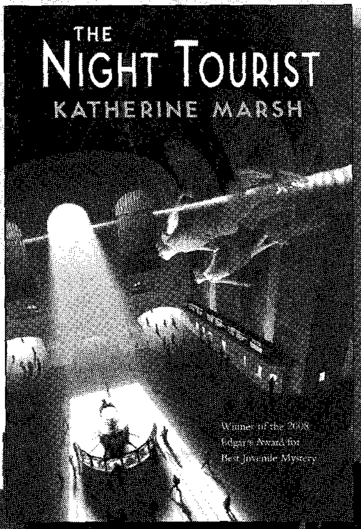

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planes should be launched, you have to go and bomb the Kremlin.' Who said that?"

Venediktov thought that he would be lucky to leave the room alive.

He replied to Yeltsin, "Boris Nikolaevich, this is my job. Echo sent me there. I'm not to blame. They said just do it and I did it."

Yeltsin looked at Venediktov awhile and then said, "Oh, well, you have a job. You're a good worker. So go work."

And that was the end of it. For all of Yeltsin's profound failings and the reflexes he had developed as a lifelong Communist apparatchik, he was rarely hostile to the press. During his Presidency, which defined the nineties, newspapers and even state and independent television flourished as never before in the history of Russia. In the wake of the failed 1991 coup, he shut down the Communist Party newspapers that had supported it. But, after receiving a petition of protest from many members of the press and the liberal intelligentsia, he relented, and *Pravda* and *Sovetskaya Rossiya* reopened. In 1996, during Yeltsin's reëlection campaign against a Communist candidate, Gennady Zyuganov, the press, including Echo of Moscow, returned the favor, running obsequious coverage that helped Yeltsin reverse his pitiful standing in the polls and defeat Zyuganov.

After Yeltsin retired, on the New Year's Eve before the new millennium, Putin assumed power and soon moved against the media, using financial and legal leverage to take over, or shut down, newspapers and television stations whose coverage he deemed unfriendly or whose ownership he deemed uncoöperative. Reporters Without Borders, in its worldwide press-freedom index, ranks Russia, in terms of liberty, a hundred and forty-fourth out of a hundred and sixty-nine countries—just behind Afghanistan and Yemen and just ahead of Saudi Arabia and Zimbabwe.

When Putin was asked by a writer how he would respond to critics who accuse him of limiting media freedom, he replied, "Very simply. We have never had freedom of speech in Russia, so I don't really understand what could be stifled. It seems to me that freedom is the ability to express one's opinion, but there must exist certain boundaries, as laid out in the law."

Article 29 of the Russian constitution says otherwise; it "guarantees" freedom of speech. Nevertheless, Putin brought the Russian media to heel with ruthless speed. The independent television station NTV, which had aggressively covered the war in Chechnya, was taken away from its founding owners in 2001 and neutered; Channel One, by far the biggest station in Russia, is once more a compliant extension of government policy.

For Putin, only television really counts. The heads of the networks are summoned to regular weekly meetings at the Kremlin to set the news agenda; executives are provided with lists enumerating the names of political opponents who are not permitted on the air. The loyalty of important anchors, station managers, and star reporters is bought with unheard-of salaries. Live television discussions and interviews no longer exist. There are newspapers and Web sites that are at least as free as Echo, but their audiences are so limited that Putin is content to relegate them to the margins and leave them alone.

"The problem is that official propaganda on television is extremely distracting—it insures that people talk about the nonsense they are showing," Yulia Latynina, a well-known newspaper columnist and commentator on Echo of Moscow, told me. "For example, if Russia drops a rocket on Georgia from a plane, the report will talk about the size of the hole and whether or not the Georgians dug the hole themselves and all sorts of other nonsense. Suddenly, you are talking about holes and not about whether Russia is trying to scare the hell out of the Republic of Georgia and other such 'enemies.' And television makes up things, too, about supposed enemies like Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia. Everyone is our enemy. Who is a good guy? Andorra? Iran? All of it is a diversion from real political information and thought."

In 2001, Putin invited Aleksei Venediktov to a meeting in the Kremlin library. By way of both embracing him and warning him about how he understood their relationship, the Russian President talked at length about the difference between enemies and traitors. "It's a crucial distinction for Putin," Venediktov said. "He said, 'Enemies are right in front of you, you are at war with them, then you make an armistice with them, and all is clear. A traitor must be destroyed, crushed.' This is his philosophy of the world. And then he said, 'You know, Aleksei, you are not a traitor. You are an enemy.' "

Foolishly, perhaps, I asked Venediktov if Putin smiled when he said this.

"Smile?" Venediktov said. "Putin never smiles. He was just making it clear in what sense I existed for him. He knows that I won't stab him in the back or play games, but that I will simply do

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near-total silence is the clear response.

—*Marilyn Hacker*

what I do. I said, 'If you want to close Echo, close it. I can't restrain myself from doing what we are here to do.' "

Venediktov had no illusions about his interlocutor or about the meeting. In effect, Putin was telling him what Tsar Nicholas I told Pushkin: "Henceforth, I will be your censor."

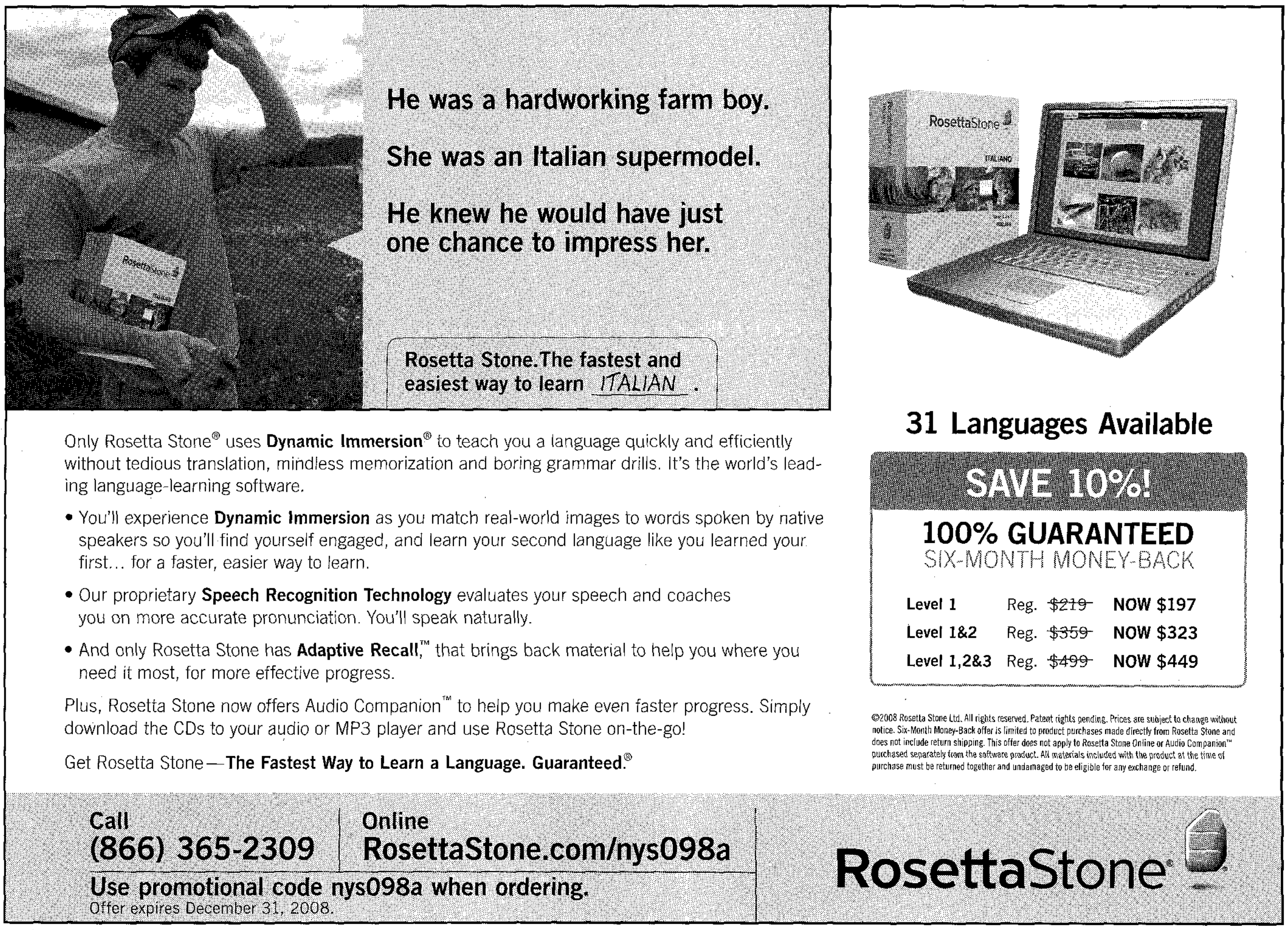
"Putin saw me because he wanted, as the intelligence professionals say, to recruit me, to draw me onto his team, and so he spoke to me with the air of a comrade," Venediktov said. "It showed a level of trust. He needed the reputation of Echo." For Putin, the station had a certain utility—as a showpiece of press liberty—but Venediktov knew that Putin could change his mind and shut it down at any time. "Putin came from the ranks of the Soviet K.G.B. and had a very different notion of the press than Yeltsin, and I could immediately see that difference when we spoke," he recalled. "I told my friends, even though all of them had voted for Vladimir Putin and believed he was a modernizing reformer, that we were going backward. No one believed me. They said that I was a narrow pessimist, that I had lost my intuition. Now, of course, they believe it."

There is no end to the paradoxical condition of Echo of Moscow. Since 2001, Echo has been owned by Gazprom, the gigantic energy conglomerate that is one of the bases of Kremlin economic and political power. Venediktov calls the Kremlin "our main shareholder." Nevertheless, Echo's reporting has been aggressive and honest, which has been especially important in the past four or five years, as, one by one, the institutions of civil society—the courts, parliament, N.G.O.s, television, and the Russian Orthodox Church—have been co-opted into the body of the state and the direct rule of Vladimir Putin.

Echo cannot possibly match the range and audience penetration of *radiotochka.* These days, Russian listeners are offered a broad choice of music, entertainment, and news (or pseudo news) on the radio, to say nothing of the competition from newer media. Echo's listenership, however, is substantial by contemporary standards: nearly a million daily in Moscow, and two and a half million nationally, and the listeners are well educated and middle-aged.

"We are a radio of influence, rather than a mass radio station," Venediktov said. "If you want to be a mass station, a crowd-pleaser, then we should probably be paying more attention to the life of Paris Hilton. But if we did that then those who are listening to us would not be listening. We'd lose them."

Despite the size of its audience, the station cannot pretend to have much sway over Russian society, which is, in the main, deeply apolitical and immensely more supportive of Putin than it ever was of Yeltsin or Gorbachev. Masha Lipman calls this Putin-era phenomenon the country's "non-participation pact": the public agrees not to meddle in politics in exchange for the chance to take part in the con-



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sumer benefits of the Russian energy boom. "Not that the West is so uniformly agitated to act when it hears about an abuse of office, but it does become a matter of politics," Lipman said. "Here, even when a tabloid like *Moskovsky Komsomolets* prints something scandalous, it doesn't instigate public debate, it doesn't affect public consciousness. People don't believe they can make a difference, and they don't give a damn. They don't want to be engaged. This is a pillar of Putin's power."

One afternoon, I met Kirill Rogov, a former editor at *Kommersant*, Russia's best mainstream daily newspaper, and a co-founder of the political Web site polit.ru, at a bar above the Mayakovsky Theatre. Rogov has retreated from a life in journalism, and is working now at a think tank in Moscow and writing occasional opinion columns, but he retains a respect for Echo. "It's been the best news service for a long time," he said. "But is a free media outlet possible in an unfree country? I would say no. In a free country, the newspaper publishes a story, it influences television, it reaches the public, then it helps to shape the course of policy. In an unfree country, Echo of Moscow lives in isolation, on a kind of Indian reservation. It broadcasts a story or a discussion and it reaches an audience, but then it never goes any further."

One of the stars at Echo of Moscow is Yevgenia Albats, a political-science professor who listened carefully to National Public Radio while studying in the United States and hoped to emulate the style when she returned home. But as a personality she is a great deal more caffeinated than anyone on NPR. She rightly says that she has the reputation of "a strange, direct woman, a little crazy, who believes in democracy." Venediktov once informed Albats that some Kremlin officials told him they had a "visceral hatred" for her. A Putin campaign adviser, a onetime dissident who had been persecuted by the K.G.B., stormed out of her studio when she informed him that "Chekists are taking over the Kremlin and now you are a proponent of these people in epaulettes."

"He went totally bananas!" she recalled.

Albats, who does solo commentaries and hosts a Sunday-evening talk show, is also the deputy editor-in-chief of *The New Times*, a weekly magazine that carries excellent investigative reports. As a journalism student at Moscow State University during the Brezhnev era, she was called in by the resident K.G.B. representative and warned that she would be expelled if she continued to seek out underground editions of banned literature. In the perestroika years, she made her name by investigating the K.G.B. and, in 1992, published a book, "The State Within a State," which foresaw the persistence and centrality of the K.G.B. in post-Soviet Russia. When we met for coffee at the National Hotel, Albats stopped our conversation after a few minutes and went over to say hello to someone at the next table.

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"Who was that?" I asked when she came back.

"Aleksei Kondaurov," she said. "Ex-general in the K.G.B. He's been on my show. We talk all the time."

Like her colleagues, Albats has discovered that Russian officials, including active agents in the intelligence services, listen to Echo as a kind of reality check.

"Decision-makers in Russia are distant from real life," she said. "They have money, they live far from the life of the country, and meanwhile the bureaucracy hides concrete information from them when it suits bureaucratic purposes. Information is the bureaucrat's commodity—he depends on it for funding, for his survival, and so he exaggerates threats, say, when it suits him. Decision-makers choke on such 'information.' For example, the bureaucrats in intelligence, in order to get more and more funding, need to feed the fears of the decision-makers, and so they exaggerate the threat of an 'Orange Revolution' "—a political rebellion of the kind that transformed Ukraine, nearly three years ago—"coming to Russia, even though no such threat exists."

Albats looked around the café and lowered her voice a few decibels. "Bureaucrats lie, and so these decision-makers listen to Echo," she went on. "It's a totally malfunctioning system, and we play an important role in it! People in the Kremlin are devoted listeners to Echo."

Under Venediktov's canny direction, the main presenters for Echo have developed an ear for what is permissible and what is not. "You can call Putin or Medvedev a fool, which, of course, was totally impossible in Soviet times, but you might get into trouble if you look into their pockets," Albats said. "You cannot say you've heard that So-and-So has sent *x* trillion dollars to this or that offshore account. These people are total conformists, total pragmatists, they have no interest at all in ideology. They care about their power and their assets."

Opinion is unfettered, in other words, but Echo falls short in the area of reporting, particularly of the investigative variety. In our conversations, Venediktov insisted, rather unconvincingly, that investigative reporting requires the ability to publish documents, "and how can you do that over the radio?" But Echo's Web site would seem to be an available tool for just that. One of the station's commentators, Yulia Latynina, admitted that investigative work is nearly "impossible," but the reasons have to do with the nature of post-Soviet Russia. "The basic problem is that you cannot really expect, in a regime like that of Marcos or Duvalier, to get solid information into your hands on bank accounts," she said. "Everyone looks the other way. This is not a dictatorship—no one should exaggerate and compare it to the Soviet Union—but in an authoritarian regime you can't conduct an effective investigation the way you can in a democratic regime. You are not discovering aberrations. In Russia today, corruption on a gigantic scale is merely a matter of economic policy. It is what it is. So all you can do is make reasonable suppositions. For example, look at the takeover of Yukos." Latynina was referring to the energy conglomerate led by Mikhail Khodorkovsky, before he was arrested, in 2003 (presumably at Putin's command), given a transparently bogus trial, and sent off to prison in Siberia. "When Yukos was taken over, it was suddenly co-owned by Putin's old friend Gennady Timchenko, of Gunvor"—an energy-trading conglomerate—"which is registered in Switzerland. Gunvor made seventy billion in revenues this year exporting for the state. So you can't really know what Putin's cut is, but you can make a supposition. I mean, either Putin is just purely generous to his friend or he has an expectation. And I doubt that Putin is that generous!"

In the late Soviet era, the number of real political dissidents was tiny. The men and women who risked everything—their jobs, their freedom, their citizenship, even their lives—were so few because the danger was so great. Venediktov certainly does not count as a post-Soviet dissident (or even a partisan activist); he is, rather, a professional, which he defines as a journalist devoted to open inquiry and discussion, come what may. Mikhail Leontyev, who until recently ran a nationalist, pro-Kremlin show on Echo of Moscow, told the Moscow *Times* that, while he disdained the station's over-all liberal politics, he admired Venediktov's openness. He added that the existence of the station proved that Putin's Kremlin was hardly vicious in its attitude to the press. "Echo of Moscow is proof of the authorities' vegetarianism," he said.

Echo's liberals, however, are not in a position of comfort. Putin made that clear to Venediktov last month. On state television, Venediktov, Yulia Latynina, and Matvei Ganapolsky—central voices on Echo—have been branded members of a subversive "fifth column."

"When you meet people from the Kremlin or the intelligence services, they always say, 'How brave you are! We always listen to Echo of Moscow!' " Latynina said. "Venediktov knows how to talk to people in the Kremlin and turn a bland face to their requests and complaints. I've never been disappointed in him even when we have disagreed. I can always say what I want and he will always defend me."

But, while Venediktov's integrity has proved as reliable as his political skills, his capacity to protect his people is limited. There have been twenty unsolved murders of journalists in Russia in the past eight years. When Anna Politkovskaya, of *Novaya Gazeta*, was killed, two years ago, three reporters at Echo walked into Venediktov's office and said that they were leaving to pursue other careers. Earlier this year, Venediktov came to New York to collect an award from the Overseas Press Club. When he told his wife, she said, "First comes the award, then comes the bullet." For now, Echo of Moscow remains open, vital to its audience, useful to the regime. "But no matter what we do," Venediktov said, "no matter how clever we are, we always have to recognize that we can be gone in a flash." ♦

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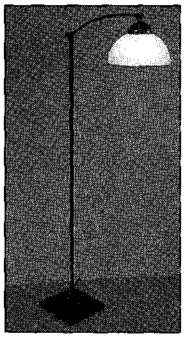

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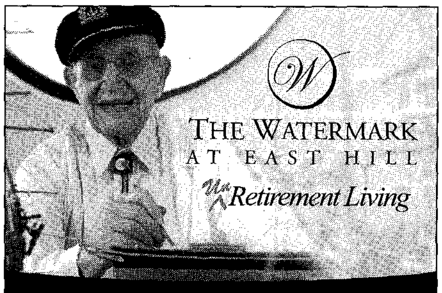

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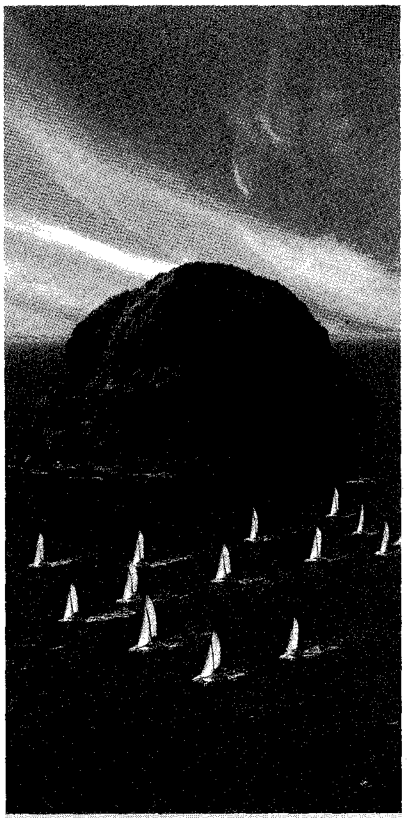

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

MY GAL

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

Explaining how she felt when John McCain offered her the Vice-Presidential spot, my Vice-Presidential candidate, Governor Sarah Palin, said something very profound: "I answered him 'Yes' because I have the confidence in that readiness and knowing that you can't blink, you have to be wired in a way of being so committed to the mission, the mission that we're on, reform of this country and victory in the war, you can't blink. So I didn't blink then even when asked to run as his running mate."

Isn't that so true? I know that many times, in my life, while living it, someone would come up and, because of I had good readiness, in terms of how I was wired, when they asked that—whatever they asked—I would just not blink, because, knowing that, if I did blink, or even wink, that is weakness, therefore you can't, you just don't. You could, but no—you aren't.

That is just how I am.

Do you know the difference between me and a Hockey Mom who has forgot her lipstick?

A dog collar.

Do you know the difference between me and a dog collar smeared with lipstick?

Not a damn thing.

We are essentially wired identical.

So, when Barack Obama says he will put some lipstick on my pig, I am, like, Are you calling me a pig? If so, thanks! Pigs are the most non-Élite of all barnyard animals. And also, if you put lipstick on my pig, do you know what the difference will be between that pig and a pit bull? I'll tell you: a pit bull can easily kill a pig. And, as the pig dies, guess what the Hockey Mom is doing? Going to her car, putting on more lipstick, so that, upon returning, finding that pig dead, she once again looks identical to that pit bull, which, staying on mission, the two of them step over the dead pig, looking exactly like twins, except the pit bull is scratching his lower ass with one frantic leg, whereas the Hockey Mom is carrying an extra hockey stick in case Todd breaks his again. But both are going, like, Ha ha, where's that dumb pig now? Dead, that's who, and also: not a smidge of lipstick.

A lose-lose for the pig.

There's a lesson in that, I think.

Who does that pig represent, and that collar, and that Hockey Mom, and that pit bull?

You figure it out. Then give me a call.

Seriously, give me a call.

Now, let us discuss the Élites. There are two kinds of folks: Élites and Regulars. Why people love Sarah Palin is, she is a Regular. That is also why they love me. She did not go to some Élite Ivy League college, which I also did not. Her and me, actually, did not go to the very same Ivy League school. Although she is younger than me, so therefore she didn't go there slightly earlier than I didn't go there. But, had I been younger, we possibly could have not graduated in the exact same class. That would have been fun. Sarah Palin is hot. Hot for a politician. Or someone you just see in a store. But, happily, I did not go to college at all, having not finished high school, due to I killed a man. But had I gone to college, trust me, it would not have been some Ivy League Élite-breeding factory but, rather, a community college in danger of losing its accreditation, built right on a fault zone, riddled with asbestos, and also, the crack-addicted professors are all dyslexic.

Sarah Palin was also the mayor of a very small town. To tell the truth, this is where my qualifications begin to outstrip even hers. I have never been the mayor of anything. I can't even spell right. I had help with the above, but now— Murray, note to Murray: do not correct what follows. Lets shoe the people how I rilly spel Mooray and punshuate so thay can c how reglar I am, and ther 4 fit to leed the nashun, do to: not sum mistir fansy pans.

OK Mooray. Get corecting agin!

Thanks, Murray, you're fabulous. Very good at what you do. Actually, Murray, come to think of it, you are so good, I suspect you are some kind of Élite. You are fired, Murray, as soon as this article is done. I'm going to hire someone Regular, who is not so excellent, and lives off the salt of the land and the fat of his brow and the sweat of his earth. Although I hope he's not a screw-up.

I'm finding it hard to concentrate, as my eyes are killing me, due to I have not blinked since I started writing this. And, me being Regular, it takes a long time for me to write something this long.

Where was I? Ah, yes: I hate Élites. Which is why, whenever I am having brain surgery, or eye surgery, which is sometimes necessary due to all my non-blinking, I always hire some random Regular guy, with shaking hands if possible, who is also a drunk, scared of the sight of blood, and harbors a secret dislike for me.

Now, let's talk about slogans. Ours is: Country First. Think about it. When you think of what should come first, what does? Us ourselves? No. That would be selfish. Our personal families? Selfish. God? God is good, I love Him, but, as our slogan suggests, no, sorry, God, You are not First. No, you don't, Lord! How about: the common good of all mankind! Is that First? Don't make me laugh with your weak blinking! No! Mercy is not First and wisdom is not First and love is super but way near the back, and ditto with patience and discernment and compassion and all that happy crap, they are all back behind Country, in the back of my S.U.V., which—Here is an example! Say I am about to run over a nun or orphan, or an orphan who grew up to become a nun—which I admire that, that is cool, good bootstrapping there, Sister—but then God or whomever goes, "It is My will that you hit that orphaned nun, do not ask Me why, don't you dare, and I say unto thee, if you do not hit that nun, via a skillful swerve, your Country is going to suffer, and don't ask Me how, specifically, as I have not decided that yet!" Well, I am going to do my best to get that nun in one felt swope, because, at the Convention, at which my Vice-Presidential candidate kicked mucho butt, what did the signs there say? Did they say "Orphaned Nuns First" and then there is a picture of a sad little nun with a hobo pack?

Not in my purview.

Sarah Palin knows a little something about God's will, knowing God quite well, from their work together on that natural-gas pipeline, and what God wills is: Country First. And not just any country! There was a slight error on our signage. Other countries, such as that one they have in France, reading our slogan, if they can even read real words, might be all, like, "Hey, bonjour, they are saying we can put our country, France, first!" Non, non, non, France! What we are saying is, you'd better put *our* country first, you merde-heads, or soon there will be so much lipstick on your pit bulls it will make your berets spin!

In summary: Because my candidate, unlike your winking/blinking Vice-Presidential candidate, who, though, yes, he did run as the running mate when the one asking him to run did ask him to run, which that I admire, one thing he did not do, with his bare hands or otherwise, is, did he ever kill a moose? No, but ours did. And I would. Please bring a moose to me, over by me, and down that moose will go, and, if I had a kid, I would take a picture of me showing my kid that dead moose, going, like, Uh, sweetie, no, he is not resting, he is dead, due to I shot him, and now I am going to eat him, and so are you, oh yes you are, which is responsible, as God put this moose here for us to shoot and eat and take a photo of, although I did not, at that time, know why God did, but in years to come, God's will was revealed, which is: Hey, that is a cool photo for hunters about to vote to see, plus what an honor for that moose, to be on the Internet.

How does the moose feel about it? Who knows? Probably not great. But do you know what the difference is between a dead moose with lipstick on and a dead moose without lipstick?

Lipstick.

Think about it.

Moose are, truth be told, Élites. They are big and fast and sort of rule the forest. Sarah took that one down a notch. Who's Élite now, Bullwinkle?

Not Sarah.

She's just Regular as heck. ♦

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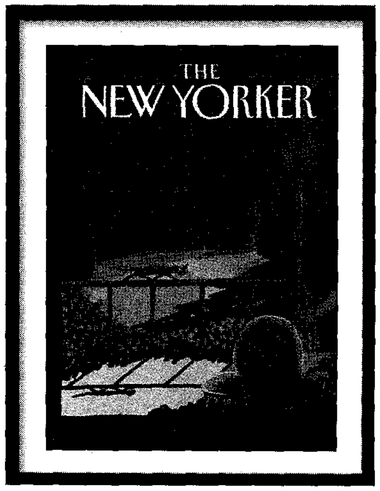

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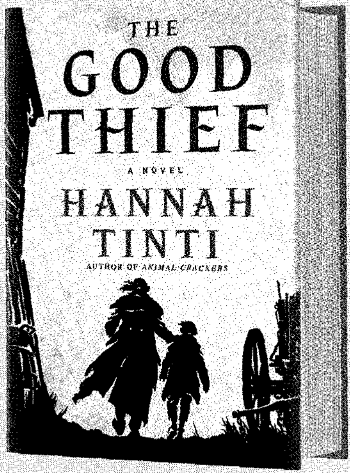

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ARTS AND LETTERS

FREEING THE ELEPHANTS

What Babar brought.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

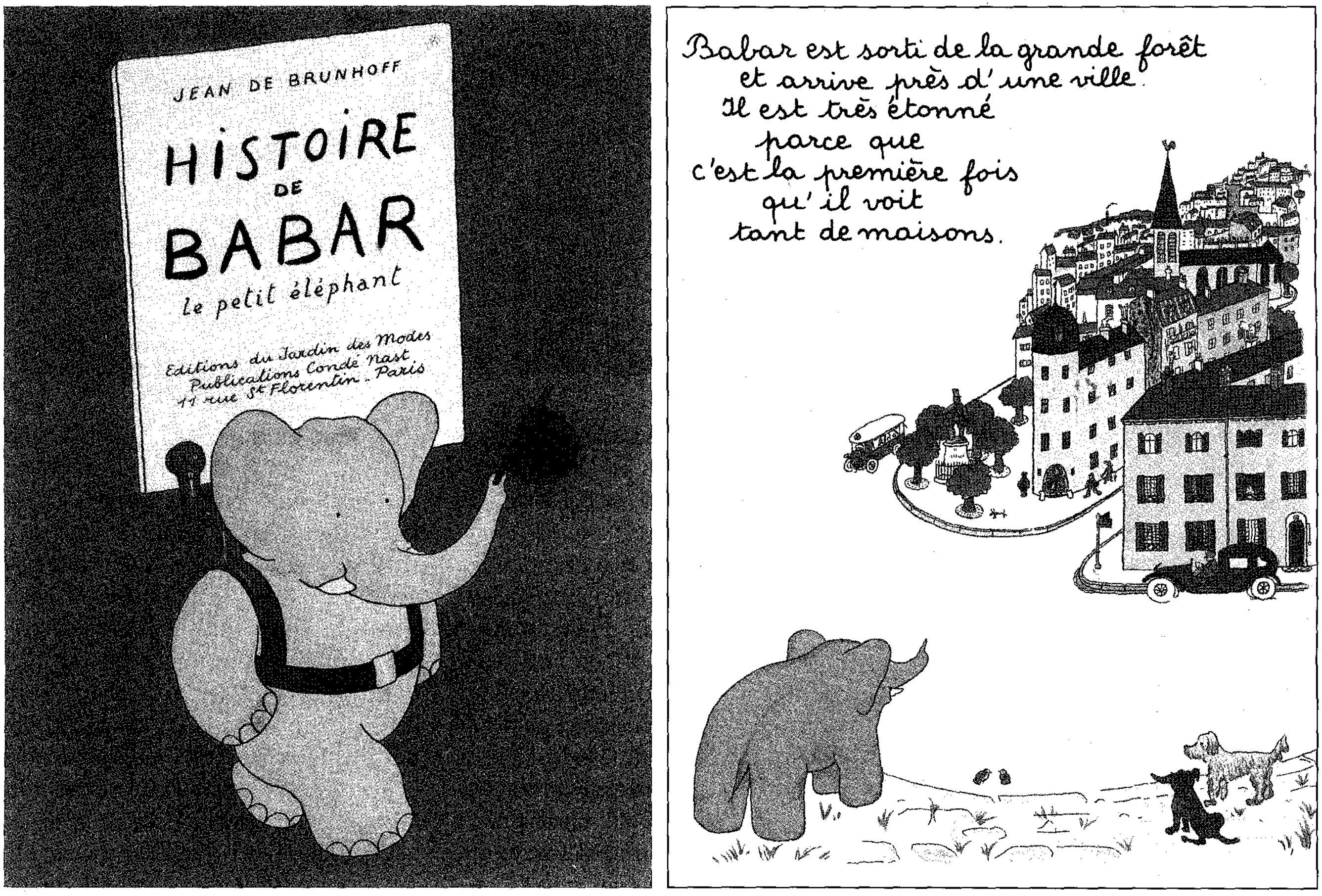
A chain of elephants, trunks and tails linked, wanders, with a mixture of upbeat energy and complacent pride, along the endpapers of a children's book. So begins one of the stories that most please the imagination of the modern child and his distant relation the modern adult—Jean de Brunhoff's "The Story of Babar," published in 1931. The Babar books are among those half-dozen picture books that seem to fix not just a character but a whole way of being, even a civilization. An elephant, lost in the city, does not trumpet with rage but rides a department-store elevator up and down, until gently discouraged by the elevator boy. A Haussmann-style city rises in the middle of the barbarian jungle. Once seen, Babar the Frenchified elephant is not forgotten. With Bemelmans's "Madeline" and Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are," the Babar books have become part of the common language of childhood, the library of the early mind. There are few parents who haven't tried them and few small children who don't like them. They also remain one of the few enterprises begun by a father and continued by his son in more or less the same style. Laurent de Brunhoff, who was twelve when his father died, at the age of just thirty-seven, picked up the elephant brush after the Second World War and has gone on producing Babar books, with the same panache, almost to this day. (Audubon's sons' continuation of their father's "Quadrupeds" is another instance, but in that case the father was alive when the sons began to carry on the work.)

Babar comes to us now in a show, at the Morgan Library & Museum, of the early drafts and watercolor drawings for the first books by both de Brunhoff *père* and de Brunhoff *fils*. Jean had produced the very first Babar book at the demand of his wife and two children, who had fallen in love with an elephant-centered bedtime story that she had been telling the children in the summer of 1930. He came from a family of artists perched on the ledge—a broad one in the France of his time—between fine-arts painting and book and fashion illustration. (De Brunhoff's father had worked with the academic Impressionist James Tissot, and his brother was the editor of French *Vogue*.)

Jean de Brunhoff was trained as a painter, and what strikes one first about his preliminary drawings for "Babar" is how much more conventionally masterly—the work of an obviously accomplished draftsman—they look than the final drawings do. The sketches are sinuous and authoritative as de Brunhoff searches out form and dramatic manner. (He made oil paintings for adult collectors, and those which survive are likewise quite conservative and finished.) The completed Babar drawings, by contrast, are beautiful small masterpieces of the faux-naïf: the elephant faces reduced to a language of points and angles, each figure cozily encased in its black-ink outline, a friezelike arrangement of figures against a background of pure color. De Brunhoff's style is an illustrator's version of Matisse, Dufy, and Derain, which by the nineteen-thirties had already been filtered and defanged and made part of the system of French design.

But the Babar books are more than the sum of their lines. By now, of course, a controversial literature is possible about *anything*, and yet to discover that there is a controversial literature about Babar is a little shocking—*faut-il brûler Babar*? ("Must we burn Babar?"), as one inquisitor puts it, in a famous French locution. And the controversial literature isn't trivial: it touches on questions that are real and enduring. In the past few decades, a series of critics on the left, most notably the Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman, have indicted Babar in the course of a surprisingly resilient and hydra-headed argument about the uses of imagery and the subtleties of imperialist propaganda. Babar, such interpreters have insisted, is an allegory of French colonization, as seen by the complacent colonizers: the naked African natives, represented by the "good" elephants, are brought to the imperial capital, acculturated, and then sent back to their homeland on a civilizing mission. The elephants that have assimilated to the ways of the metropolis dominate those which have not. The true condition of the animals—to be naked, on all fours, in the jungle—is made shameful to them, while to become an imitation human, dressed and upright, is to be given the right to rule. The animals that resist—the rhinoceroses—are defeated. The Europeanized elephants are, as in the colonial mechanism of indirect rule, then made trustees of the system, consuls for the colonial power. To be made French is to be made human and to be made superior. The straight lines and boulevards of Celesteville, the argument goes, are the sign of enslavement. Through such subtle imprinting, the premises of imperialism come to be treated as natural. The case cannot be dismissed out of hand: it's easy to see that, say, "Little Black Sambo," for all his pancake-eating charms, needs to be thought through before being introduced to young readers, while, to take an extreme example, a book from nineteen-thirties Germany about the extermination of long-nosed rats by obviously Aryan cats would go on anyone's excluded list, however beautifully drawn.

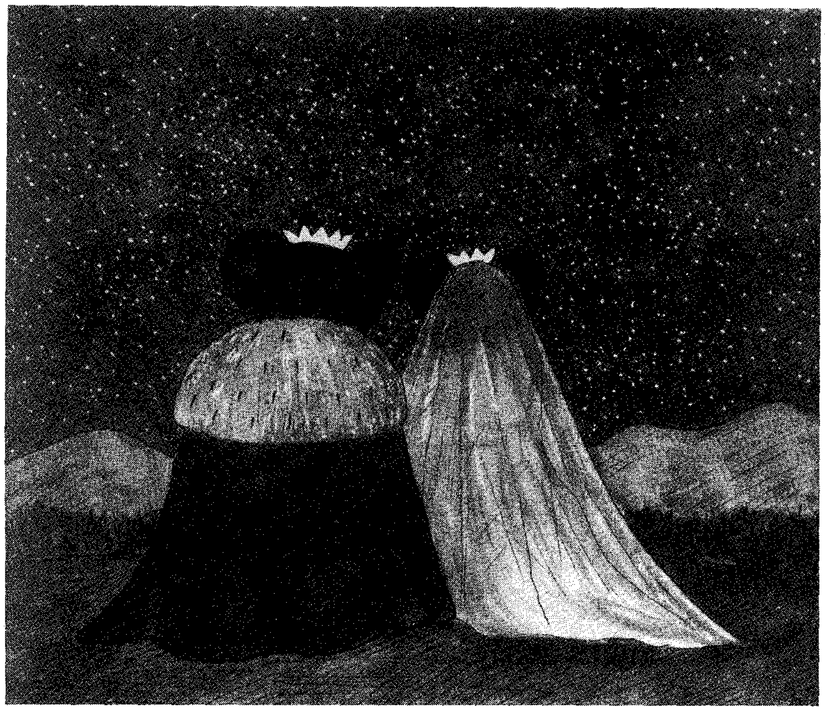
Yet those who would burn "Babar" miss the true subject of the books. The de Brunhoffs' saga is not an unconscious expression of the French colonial imagination; it is a self-conscious comedy *about* the French colonial imagination and its close relation to the French domestic imagination. The gist of the classic early books of the nineteen-thirties—"The Story of Babar" and "Babar the King," particularly—is explicit and intelligent: the lure of the city, of civilization, of style and order and bourgeois living is real, for elephants as for humans. The costs of those things are real, too, in the perpetual care, the sobriety of effort, they demand. The happy effect that Babar has on us, and our imaginations, comes from this knowledge—from the child's strong sense that, while it is a very good thing to be an elephant, still, the life of an elephant is dangerous, wild, and painful. It is therefore a safer thing to be an elephant in a house near a park.

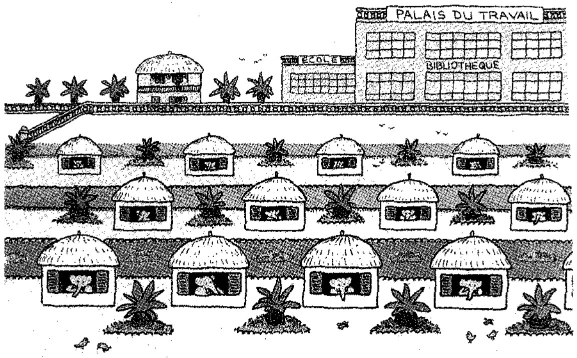


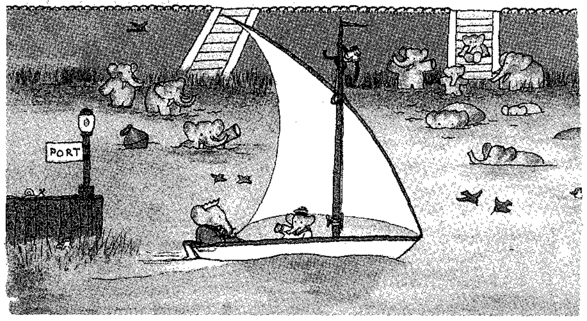
Some left-wing critics have read in the Babar story an implicit endorsement of the civilizing effects of French colonialism.

LEFT: MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM; RIGHT: LIBRAIRIE HACHETTE 1939/HACHETTE LIVRE 2006

Every children's story that works at all begins with a simple opposition of good and evil, of straightforward innocence and envious corruption. While the good hero or heroine has to be particularized, with flaws and idiosyncrasies, the evil force is, oddly, the more powerful the less distinct it is; because villainy is itself so interesting, there's no great need to particularize the villain. In few works of children's literature is the creation of dull and faceless evil as effective as it is in the Babar saga. "Page 2 of 'Babar' " is a code word among certain parents for the entire issue of what it is right to expose our children to. (It's actually the sixth numbered page in the book, and the fourth page in the story, but it seems to register as page 2, being the second element after the introduction of the elephant nursery idyll.) It is there that Babar's mother, with her little elephant on her back, is murdered, with casual brutality, by a squat white hunter. The pro-page-twoers think that







without the incident the story is robbed of motive and pathos; the anti-page-twoers think that it's just too hard, too early, and too brutal, so they turn the story into one of a little elephant who merely wanders into Paris—not such a bad premise. (Maurice Sendak, in a lovely appraisal of Babar, recalls thinking that the act of violence that sets Babar off is not sufficiently analyzed—that the trauma is left unhealed and even untreated—while Nicholas Fox Weber, in his good book about the art of the elephant saga, suggests that Babar's "apparent indifference to his mother's shooting is a by-product of the essential drive to see beauty and continue living no matter how tragic the past.")

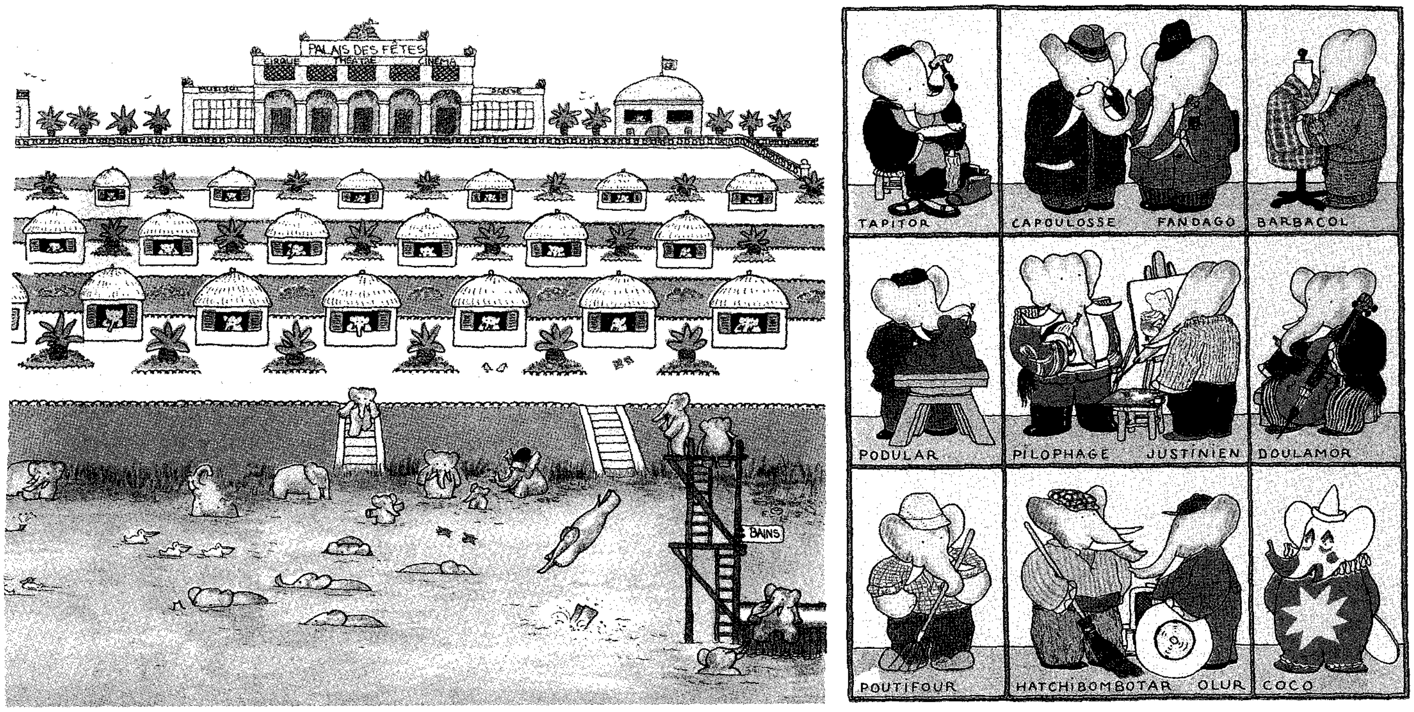
Whether the motive is amnesiac or therapeutic, the moment when the lost and motherless elephant enters the French city—Paris, surely, though also standing in for French colonial capitals from Saigon to Casablanca—is a magical moment. The arrival is subdued and simple, creating a tension between the savanna and the city that is continually renewed, and around which the whole series will be structured. The exoticism of the Babar story is obviously a Fifth Arrondissement exoticism, like that of the turn-of-the-century Douanier Henri Rousseau, whose harmless but rapacious paintings of wild animals, inspired by visits to the zoo, have much of the same sober charm as Jean de Brunhoff's. And the dream of the desert as an enchanted place, which takes such powerful form in Rousseau's matchless "Sleeping Gypsy," as in de Brunhoff's unforgettable nocturne of Babar and his bride, connects the two.

But there is a deeper connection between this kind of French made-at-home exoticism and the domestic charm of Babar—between, if you like, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Henri Rousseau, between the idea of the native genius of children and a romantic vision of Africa. France during the nineteen-thirties was in transition from an old, unashamedly predatory model of imperialism to one that insisted on the *mission civilisatrice*—the vauntedly benevolent gathering of different races into one French commonwealth—and, simultaneously, from a model of work and labor as their own reward to one in which the reward of irksome labor was French family leisure.

This double "primitivism" of the hearth and the heathen, the foyer and the faraway, is apparent in the books' visual style, even more than in the obvious and much argued-over story line. High Fauve style, from the beginning, and in the hands of Matisse in particular, was connected to children's art and the idea of childhood. Picasso saw this keenly, speaking often (if with a hint of condescension) of how crucially the drawings of Matisse's children had affected their father's art, and for the better, supplying a kind of domestic primitivism, an African art of the nursery. That is visible even in a masterpiece as sophisticated as Matisse's "Piano Lesson," of 1916, where the play between the oppressive weight of French teaching and the gasping attempt at pleasure weighs on the boy. And the traffic between the exotic elephant and the French nursery is already implied, in a more complex form, in Matisse's "The Moroccans," of the same year, in which the remote decorative style of French-colonized Africa is rephrased in terms of the metropolitan faux-naïf. (Although "tribal" art is in no way childlike, French artists, wrongly but fruitfully, saw it that way.) The tightrope between the exotic and the domestic that the Babar books walk is central to the French imagination of the first half of the twentieth century: the great desert opens onto the great city; the beautiful patterning of the carpet gives life to the gray light of the Île de France; we dream of the elephants, and the elephant dreams of a green suit and a motorcar. (The children's dining room of the French ocean liner Normandie was, tellingly, decorated with de Brunhoff's elephants, animal totems of French voyaging.)

All of which complicates one's sense of the politics of "Babar," too. One can forget, reading the critics, that the books are, first and last, meant to be *funny*, and that Babar is an elephant who talks and walks: the story is happening to creatures that children know do not ride elevators, wear suits, or build buildings. Part of the joke is in the way the obvious animalness of the

LEFT: MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM; CENTER AND RIGHT: LIBRAIRIE HACHETTE 1939



protagonist makes evident the absurdity of the human behavior depicted. An animal that attempts to become an astronaut or conduct an orchestra is inherently ridiculous and makes the ambition ridiculous as he pursues it. That's why Daffy Duck in "Duck Dodgers" is daffy.

As an elephant who takes on the role of the bourgeois patriarch (and monarch), Babar reveals that role's touching absurdity. In "Babar the King" (1933)—the central book in the Babar saga—the rhinos and the elephants have been at war, but the point isn't that the rhinos are evil. It is that war between nations is as absurd in reality as war between animals looks on the page. Becoming French, the elephants reveal the absurd and contrived elements of the French national character. Celesteville is a parody of the French corporatist dream, beautifully expressed, in "Babar the King," in the drawing of the elephants at their various occupations, as Cartesian and logical as a poster from the pedagogical-instruments house Deyrolle:

> If Barbacol wants a statue for his mantelpiece, he asks Podular to carve one for him, and when Podular's coat is worn out Barbacol makes a new one to order for him. . . . Hatchibombotar cleans the streets, Olur repairs the automobiles, and, when they are all tired, Doulamor plays his cello to entertain them. . . . As for Coco, he keeps them all laughing and gay.

There are no bankers or stockbrokers in Celesteville. Capitalism is elided, as are unnecessary "middlemen," in this perfect Comtian economy, in which each does his job and receives his goods. There is to be no ambition, either, no upwardly mobile individual elephant. (That is an American elephant's notion.) The reward for this serene corporatism is apparent on the next page: after working in the morning, the elephants take the afternoon off. And this society provides continuity with the classical traditions—the elephants, bewigged and formal, attend a production of the Comédie-Française.

Surely the happy effect this has on the reader, and the elephants, is not the result of our (or their) having been propagandized to accept colonial hegemony. This isn't a portrait at a distance of an imaginary colonial city. It is, instead, an affectionate, closeup caricature of an idealized French society. The fragility of this society—and its inability to resist the rhinoceroses—only intensifies the pathos and affection it inspires.

So "a certain idea of France," in de Gaulle's phrase, is at the heart of the appeal of the Babar books. What is that idea, and how does it differ from our idea of England or America? All children's books take as their subject disorder and order and their proper relation, beginning in order and ending there, but with disorder given its due. In our century, different ideas of order have been represented in children's literature by a city or a country. The Mary Poppins stories, "Peter Pan," "The Wind in the Willows," and, in a slightly different way, "The Hobbit" all use an idea of England and, often, of London. Here order is internal, found at home, part of the natural world of the nursery and the riverbank; disorder lies beyond, at times threatening but more often beckoning as a source of joy and Dionysian possibility—as in the beautiful chapter entitled "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn," in "The Wind in the Willows," or the celestial circus in "Mary Poppins." Order, in the English vision, is comforting but plain; disorder is perilous but romantically alluring. We escape the nursery for the disorder of the park.

The idea of Paris that one finds in the Babar books—or in the Madeline books—has another shape. Disorder is imagined as internal, psychological; the natural world is accepted as inherently *coquin*, "mean," or potentially violent. Order needs to be created by constant infusions of education and city planning; it is a source of Apollonian pleasure. Paris is the place where you go up and down in the elevator. Madeline's wish is to walk along

Jean de Brunhoff, a trained painter, worked hard to make his Babar illustrations as simple as possible. He ended up creating a kind of domestic primitivism, a faux-naïf style that affectionately parodied the ordered rhythms of French bourgeois existence.

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the parapet, while Miss Clavel wakes every night to sense that something is not right, and the girls walk in two straight lines to hold disorder at bay. When disorder arrives—Madeline and Pepito's time with the Gypsies, Babar and Celeste's imprisonment in the circus—it takes the form of a new routine. Disorder is the normal mess of life, what rhinos like. Order is what elephants (that is, Frenchmen) achieve at a cost and with effort. To stray from built order is to confront the man with a gun.

In the children's classics of New York—"From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler," "The House on East 88th Street," "Stuart Little," "The Pushcart War," "Harriet the Spy"—neither order nor disorder is taken to be natural. The world of the books oscillates unpredictably between them, producing battles and freaks. The best we can find are small secret islands of order. Everything turns on the individual child and her ability to create a safe miniworld of her own within the big chaotic city.

In London, in children's books, life is too orderly and one longs for the vitality of the wild; in Paris, order is an achievement, hard won against the natural chaos and cruelty of adult life; in New York, we begin most stories in an indifferent city and the child has to create a kind of order within it. Each scheme reflects a history: the English vision being a natural consequence of a peaceful nation with a reformist history and in search of adventure; the French of a troubled nation with a violent history in search of peace; and the American of an individualistic and sporadically violent country with a strong ethos of family isolation and improvised rules. We go to the imaginary Paris for sudden glimpses of evil (the death of Babar's mother) set off by satisfying visions of aesthetic bliss (the Celesteville Bureau of Industry, situated near the Amusement Hall), just as we go to the imaginary London to satisfy our longing for adventure and the undefined elsewhere, which returns us safely in the end to Cherry Tree Lane. And we go to the imaginary New York for the pleasure of the self-made: to see two children actually hide and live in a museum; to see an alligator, or a mouse, absorbed uncontroversially into a normal life.

Fables for children work not by pointing to a moral but by complicating the moral of a point. The child does not dutifully take in the lesson that salvation lies in civilization, but, in good Freudian fashion, takes in the lesson that the pleasures of civilization come with discontent at its constraints: you ride the elevator, dress up in the green suit, and go to live in Celesteville, but an animal you remain—the dangerous humans and rhinoceroses are there to remind you of that—and you delight in being so. There is allure in escaping from the constraints that button you up and hold you; there is also allure in the constraints and the buttons. We would all love to be free, untrammelled elephants, but we long, too, for a green suit.

Far more than an allegory of colonialism, the Babar books are a fable of the difficulties of a bourgeois life. "Truly it is not easy to bring up a family," Babar sighs at one point, and it is true. The city lives on the edge of a desert, and animals wander in and out at will, and then wander out again to make cities of their own. The civilizing principle is energetic but essentially comical, solid-looking on the outside but fragile in its foundations, reducible to rubble by rhinoceroses. Even the elephants, for all their learning and sailor suits, can be turned into slaves through a bad twist of fate. The unruliness of natural life is countered by the beautiful symmetries of classical style and the absurd orderliness of domestic life—but we are kidding ourselves if we imagine that we are ever really safe. Death is a rifle shot and a poisoned mushroom away. The only security, the de Brunhoff books propose, lies in our commitment to those graceful winged elephants that, in Babar's dream, at the end of "Babar the King," chase away misfortune. Love and Happiness, who are at the heart of the American vision, are, in Babar's dream, mere tiny camp followers. The larger winged elephants, which are at the forefront of this French vision of civilized life, are instead Intelligence, Patience, Learning, and Courage. "Let's work hard and cheerfully and we'll continue to be happy," the Old Lady tells the elephants, and, though we know that the hunter is still in the woods, it is hard to know what more to add. ♦

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OUTSIDE MAN

Spike Lee's unending struggle.

BY JOHN COLAPINTO

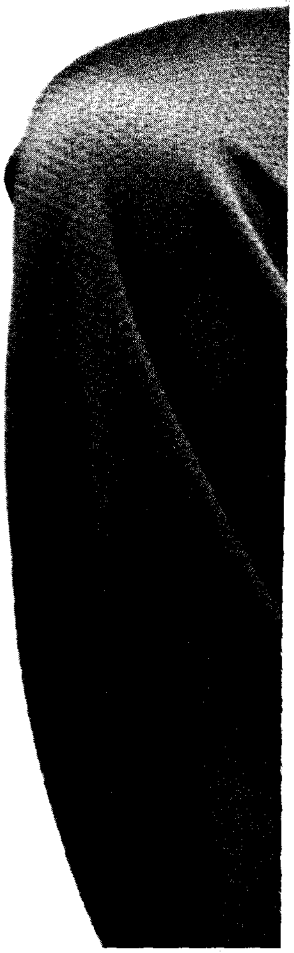
One morning last June, Spike Lee arrived early at the Sony Pictures Studios, in Culver City, California, to record the score for his new feature, "Miracle at St. Anna," a Second World War film about the U.S. Army's 92nd Division, an all-black unit that battled the Nazis during the Italian campaign. Lee was joined in the studio's control room by his music-recording team, six men and one woman. A large window overlooked the cavernous soundstage where Judy Garland recorded "Over the Rainbow," in 1938, when the lot belonged to M-G-M. A ninety-five-piece orchestra that Lee had engaged had not yet arrived.

A month earlier, at a press conference at the Cannes Film Festival, Lee had sparked a very public feud with Clint Eastwood when he accused him of having omitted black soldiers from his two recent movies about Iwo Jima, "Flags of Our Fathers" and "Letters from Iwo Jima." (Historians estimate that between seven hundred and nine hundred black servicemen participated in the battle.) The spat had quickly escalated. Eastwood told the *Guardian* that he had left the black soldiers out because none had actually raised the flag, adding that "a guy like that should shut his face." Lee shot back, telling ABCNews.com that Eastwood sounded like "an angry old man," and that "the man is not my father and we're not on a plantation either."

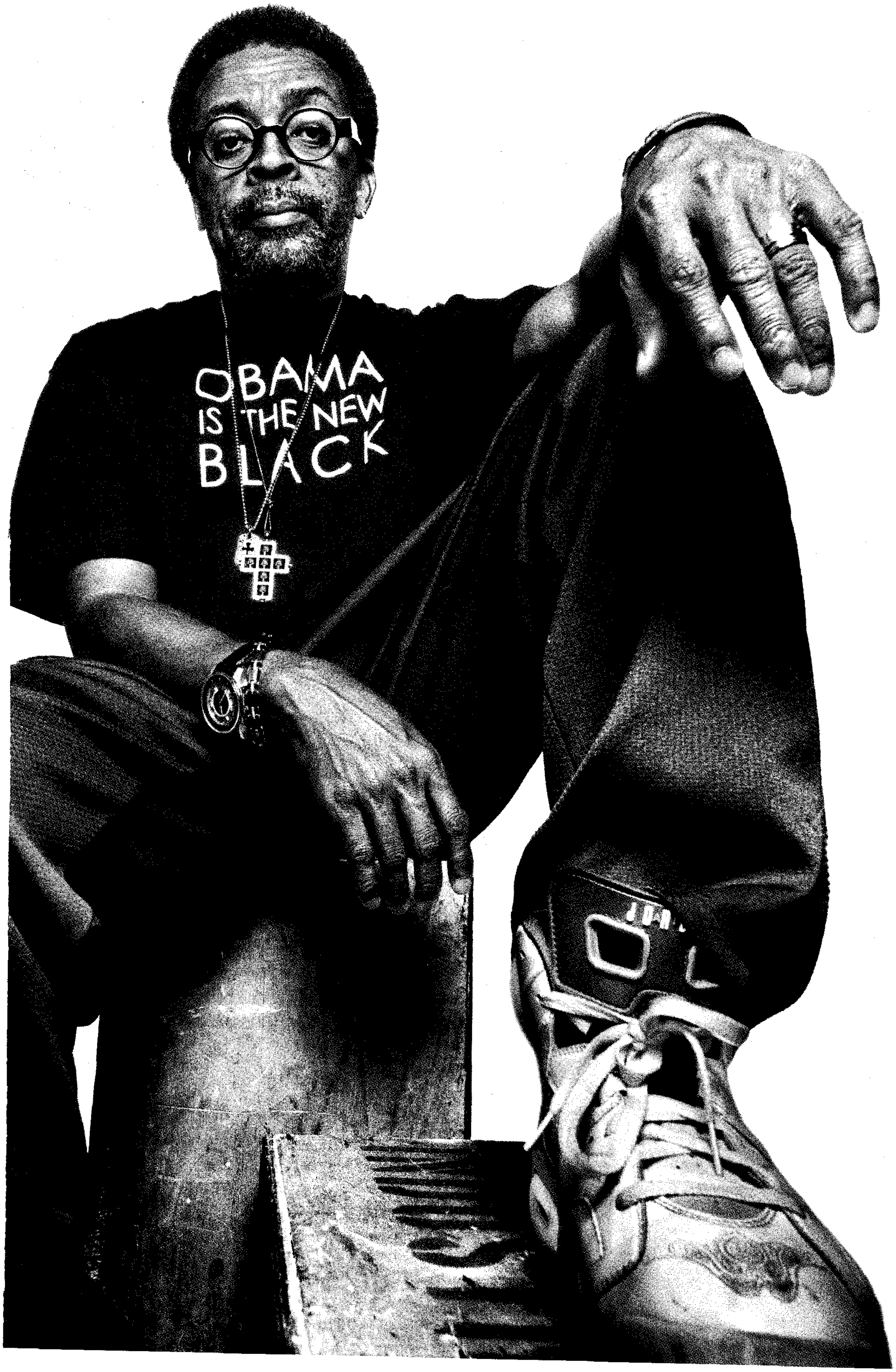
Lee's remarks appeared online three days before he began recording the score for "Miracle." Lee sees the movie, the first by a major American director to treat the experience of black soldiers in the war, as redress not only for Eastwood's Iwo Jima pictures but for an all-white Hollywood vision of the Second World War which dates to the 1962 John Wayne movie "The Longest Day"—and before. "This is the same shit they were doing back in the forties, fifties, and sixties," Lee had told me a couple of weeks earlier, in New York. "Really, until Jim Brown was in the 'The Dirty Dozen,' in 1967. 'Home of the Brave' was a great film with a great African-American character in it. But if you look at the history of World War Two films we're invisible. We're omitted."

As the orchestra began to gather on the soundstage, Lee scribbled notes about the score on a yellow legal pad. He is five feet six, with a barrel chest and a pigeon-toed walk. His baleful, half-hooded eyes peered out from behind tortoiseshell frames. There was a diamond stud in his left earlobe. He is fifty-one, and when he briefly removed his Yankees cap a small bald spot was visible at the crown of his short Afro. He wore an orange T-shirt with a picture of Barack Obama and the word "REPRESENT," and new Air Jordan sneakers with pastel-blue stripes around the soles and gingham details. Lee is a Knicks fan, but he was wearing the sneakers in honor of the Lakers, who that evening were playing in Game Three of the N.B.A. finals. "Going to the game tonight," he said to Marvin Morris, the movie's music editor, a mountainous African-American man who sat beside him at the table. "I gotta come correct!"

It's been more than twenty years since Lee's début, the 1986 movie "She's Gotta Have It"—a breezy sex comedy about a liberated African-American woman and her three male suitors—and he remains Hollywood's most prominent black filmmaker. He has directed eighteen features, three of which ("Do the Right Thing," "Jungle Fever," and "Malcolm X") have earned him a reputation as a filmmaker obsessed with race. Releasing movies at an average of nearly one a year, Lee has maintained a pace matched, in



Lee's persona can seem intimidating. "People think I'm this angry black man walking around in a constant state of rage," he complains. Photograph by Platon.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this country, only by Woody Allen. Lee is the artistic director of N.Y.U.'s graduate film program, where he teaches a master class in directing. He also makes music videos and TV commercials (he has done spots for Converse, Jaguar, Taco Bell, and Ben & Jerry's, among others) and has made two superb documentaries: "4 Little Girls," about the 1963 bombing by the Ku Klux Klan of a black church in Alabama, and "When the Levees Broke," about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. He is able to accomplish so much in part because he often rises at 5 A.M. "You want to get a lot done, you gotta get up in the morning," he told me. The rest, he says, is "time management." But Lee's output also reflects the unusual fecundity of his imagination. "Spike was the idea man," Herb Eichelberger, who taught Lee in an undergraduate film course at Clark College (now Clark Atlanta University), in 1977, told me. "He was a good writer, and he would explore those ideas and turn those ideas and nurse those ideas and turn them into full-blown mini-epics."

Terence Blanchard, the score's composer, arrived in the control room, and Lee stood up to greet him. A heavyset African-American from New Orleans, Blanchard has known Lee for twenty years. He played trumpet on "She's Gotta Have It," "School Daze," and "Mo' Better Blues," and in 1991 Lee hired him to be the composer for "Jungle Fever." Blanchard has scored all but two of Lee's films since. Unlike most directors, Lee includes the composer in the process from the start, often before a script even exists—"from the inception of ideas," as he puts it. During shooting, Lee sends Blanchard the dailies, and once a rough cut is assembled Blanchard travels to New York, where he and Lee watch the film and discuss where to put music. Blanchard then creates musical sketches and themes, which he sends to Lee. "Once I O.K. that," Lee says, "Terence sits down and writes the music." Blanchard later told me that Lee is unusual for his love of highly melodic scores that can almost stand on their own in live performance. (Lee's emphasis on the music results in scores that often clash with the dialogue, making it difficult to hear the actors. "Of course you want people to understand the dialogue," he told me. "But the human brain is wonderful—with the correct score and the correct mix, the brain can multitask and hear the dialogue and the music at the same time.")

MARISA ACOCELLA MARCHETTO

"I'm reading 'A Girl's Guide to Aerial Hunting, Shooting, Gutting, and Fishing.'"

Before Lee and Blanchard could get to work, a Sony studio employee approached carrying a cardboard tube that contained a poster of "Miracle at St. Anna." He wanted the men to sign it, so that it could be mounted in the hallway next to posters for other movies whose scores had been recorded in the studio.

"Yeah, O.K.," Lee said, brusquely. He added, "We want the John Williams spot"—referring to the composer who writes the endlessly imitated music for Steven Spielberg's movies.

"You'll be right next to John Williams," the Sony man said, in a mollifying tone. "How's that?"

"We want the John Williams-Spielberg, you know?" Lee repeated.

"We'll take down the 'Memoirs of a Geisha,' and put yours—"

"Don't put us next to Judd Apapoe, whatever that guy is," Lee interrupted, referring to Judd Apatow, the director of the goofball comedies "Knocked Up" and "The 40-Year-Old Virgin." "We gotta be next to Spielberg and Williams!"

"You got it," the man said. He obtained the signatures, then scurried away like a soldier ducking enemy fire.

Blanchard opened a soundproof door and walked onto the soundstage, where he took his place at a podium facing the musicians. On a large screen at the back of the stage, a scene from the end of the film began to play: battle-weary black soldiers moved through the cobblestoned streets of Colognora, a tiny hill town in Tuscany near where the 92nd Division, also known as the Buffalo Soldiers (they took the name from the original Buffalo Soldiers, six all-black Army regiments from the late nineteenth century), fought in the Second World War. Nazi soldiers staged an ambush, and Lee captured the ensuing violence with a series of sweeping tracking shots and fast edits that are characteristic of his kinetic visual style. The orchestra played Blanchard's surging score—a passage heavy on brasses and piercing violins, but in a minor key and with a slow tempo that contrasted sharply with the battle onscreen. Where many filmmakers would have demanded a rousing score to complement the action, Blanchard and Lee had devised music that was unexpectedly elegiac, emphasizing the wasted lives. (In an earlier scene, Lee had paused to show a series of close-ups of dead American soldiers lying in a river, their lifeless eyes reflecting the sky, blood flowing from their helmets.) As the battle scene unfolded, Lee got up from the console and hurried to the front of the control room, where he sat at a table that held a small monitor. He moved his face close to the screen as a G.I. spoke his dying words to a fellow-soldier. A trumpet played softly under the dialogue. When the scene ended, Lee leaped from his chair and shouted, “*Woooo!*”

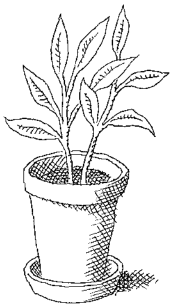
Blanchard came back into the control room. “Was the brass big enough?” he asked.

“Hell, yeah,” Lee said. He laughed, jumped up and down, and shouted, “God damn!”

The plot of “Miracle at St. Anna” revolves around a bond that forms between one of the Buffalo Soldiers and an orphaned nine-year-old Italian boy, and, in this respect, “Miracle” reflects Lee’s opinion—as he expressed it to me—that love can transcend color. But the movie is not without racial provocations. It is based on a novel by James McBride, who adapted it for the screen, but Lee had McBride add a scene involving Axis Sally—Germany’s version of Tokyo Rose—a woman born in Portland, Maine, who migrated to Germany before the war and, embracing the Nazi cause, broadcast anti-American propaganda over Radio Berlin. In the film, Axis Sally, played by the German actress Alexandra Maria Lara, is shown sitting at a table in front of a swastika, speaking into a microphone. Her words echo over loudspeakers mounted on trucks as the Buffalo Soldiers advance toward the Serchio River: “Welcome, Ninety-second Division, Buffalo Soldiers. We’ve been waiting for you. Do you know our German Wehrmacht has been here digging bunkers for six months? Waiting? Your white commanders won’t tell you that, of course. Why? Because they don’t care if you die. But the German people have nothing against the Negro. That’s why I’m warning you now with all my heart and soul. Save yourself, Negro brothers. Why die for a nation that doesn’t want you? A nation that treats you like a slave! Did I say slave? Yes I did!”

Lee had intercut the speech with reaction shots of the Buffalo Soldiers wincing and even weeping as they advanced. When the scene ended, he clapped his hands, cackled, and said, “*Yee, yee, yee!*”

Lee told me that he had exhaustively researched the history of the Buffalo Soldiers in the Second World War, but Axis Sally’s speech does not derive from a particular broadcast. Lee said that he had come up with the idea for the speech and asked McBride to incorporate it into the scene. “I suggested to him what to write,” Lee told me, adding that he liked the idea of putting accusations of racism in the mouth of a Nazi sympathizer. “Propaganda with some truth in it,” Lee explained. “Very unsettling to the Buffalo Soldiers.”



The effect was powerful, if not exactly subtle, but such gestures have got Lee into trouble in the past. He has justified his manipulations of reality on artistic grounds. For “Do the Right Thing,” his cinematic anatomy of a race riot, which was shot in the summer of 1988 in the drug- and crime-riddled Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, Lee’s crew spent weeks cleaning up a street of crack houses—painting façades, fixing broken stoops—before the filming began, and Lee makes no reference to drugs in the movie, a decision for which he was heavily criticized. Lee responded by saying, “This film is not about drugs,” and by accusing those who challenged him of racial stereotyping. “Drugs is in every level of society today in America,” he told reporters at a press conference at the time. “How many of you journalists saw ‘Working Girl’ or ‘Rain Man’ and questioned where are the drugs? Nobody!”

Such explanations have not satisfied some. “The fact that Spike Lee is a talented guy is inarguable,” Stanley Crouch, the African-American cultural critic who has long been one of Lee’s fiercest detractors, says. “But if you make movies as consistently inferior to the movies of a man like Woody Allen or Martin Scorsese and cry ‘racism’ or imply racism, when your movies are not as successful as theirs are—what is that? On a human level, his comprehension of other people is far more shallow than theirs is, and that’s the basic problem that he’s had from the beginning of his career, the fundamental shallowness that you get from a propagandist.”

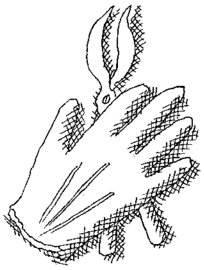
Scorsese, however, says that he admires Lee. “I always responded to his work as a fresh, original American voice in cinema—mainstream cinema,” Scorsese told me. “From ‘She’s Gotta Have It’ all the way up to ‘Inside Man’”—Lee’s 2006 film about a bank heist and his biggest commercial success to date. “I like the way he tells a story with pictures and sound, which is filmmaking. He actually pushes the medium in narrative storytelling. The way he uses the moving camera, the way he edits films, the use of music, the film stock that he uses—in particular, in one of the best American films, ‘Malcolm X,’ but also in the documentaries. When you look at the list of the work that he’s done—films, commercials, documentaries—the nature of the voice that he is in the entertainment industry in America is quite unique.”

“People think I’m this angry black man walking around in a constant state of rage,” Lee complained to me when we first met, in New York last May. His annoyance at this perception is understandable; he can be funny and warm, and even his angriest movies are leavened with humor. Yet the persona he projects, imperious and impatient, can be intimidating. He had invited me to join him at the Jazz Standard to listen to Blanchard, who was playing trumpet with his small jazz combo. He sat through Blanchard’s gig uttering only a few words to me, and gave me a stern glance when I tried to initiate conversation between numbers. Afterward, when some of Lee’s fans gathered to ask for autographs, Lee responded to the smiling face of a white woman from Cincinnati with a glare so unwelcoming that she quickly retreated.

Ernest Dickerson, who has known Lee since they were classmates at N.Y.U. film school, in the early eighties, and who shot all of Lee’s movies up to and including “Malcolm X,” before becoming a director himself, said of Lee, “He’s never suffered fools. You’ve got to bring your best game to him. He looks at everybody with ‘O.K., what’re you doing?’ On ‘Mo’ Better Blues,’ I had to fire most of my camera crew because mistakes were being made. And there’s nothing worse than sitting next to Spike in dailies when the dailies have problems." Blanchard told me that Lee once became so incensed by the tardiness of a music copyist during the scoring of "Malcolm X" that he hurled a chair across the room and had the copyist fired.

Lee was born Shelton Jackson Lee, in Atlanta, Georgia, but his mother, Jacquelyn (who died in 1977, from cancer, when Lee was twenty), gave him the nickname Spike because, she later told him, he was "a tough baby." Lee is the eldest of six children (he has a half brother, Arnold, from his father's second marriage), and he has employed several of his siblings on his movie sets. His sister Joie, an actress, has had parts in many of his movies; his brother David is a unit still photographer; and his brother Cinqué is Lee's videographer, who tapes the behind-the-scenes action on the film sets. Joie and Cinqué co-wrote with Lee his 1994 movie "Crooklyn," a delicately nostalgic autobiographical account of growing up in Brooklyn, where the family moved when Lee was two years old.

Lee has called his family "very artistic." Jacquelyn was a high-school teacher of art and African-American literature, and Lee's father, Bill, played standup jazz bass but also recorded with Peter, Paul & Mary, Judy Collins, Bob Dylan, Theodore Bikel, Josh White, and Odetta. "My father would take us up to the Newport Jazz Festival," Lee told me. "Or, if he was playing at the Village Vanguard or the Bitter End, sometimes we could stay up late and go with him." For a time, Bill Lee was the sole breadwinner, but when electric bass became ubiquitous in popular music, in the mid-sixties, he refused to play it and stopped getting the lucrative studio work that had supported the family. His wife was obliged to return to teaching. "I like the artistic stance," Lee told me, with an exasperated laugh. "You have a family to support!" But he added, with admiration, "He's never played electric bass to date."



Lee's mother took the children to Broadway plays and to movies, but Lee maintains that he was not like many directors, who say that they knew from childhood that they wanted to make movies. "I loved sports," he says. "I knew I was never going to play professional sports, but I loved playing and I went to all the games I could afford to." When Lee was eight, the family moved to Cobble Hill, then an Italian-American neighborhood of Brooklyn. They were the first black family to do so, Lee says. "First couple of days, we got called 'nigger,' by some kids," he told me. "Once they saw that there wasn't a hundred other black families moving in behind us, like we're the only one, then it was O.K. and it was never an issue after that." Most of Lee's friends from the local public schools that he attended were white. (The family later moved to the middle-class black neighborhood of Fort Greene, to a brownstone where his father, now eighty, still lives.)

After Lee graduated from John Dewey High School, in 1975, he became the third generation in his family to attend Morehouse, the all-black college in Atlanta. In the summer of 1977, after his sophomore year, he returned to New York and searched, unsuccessfully, for a job. David Berkowitz, the "Son of Sam" serial killer, was terrorizing Manhattan with random shootings, and in July there was a citywide blackout, which lasted twenty-five hours and resulted in widespread looting, arson, and vandalism. Lee, carrying a Super-8 camera that he had been given the previous Christmas, went into the streets to film the chaos. "I just spent that whole summer shooting," he said.

When he returned to Morehouse for his junior year, he decided to major in mass communications. The program was based at Clark College, nearby, and included print journalism, radio, television, and film. "Once I decided I wanted to be a filmmaker, I really started growing up," Lee says. "I was really focussed." Eichelberger, his film professor, demanded that his students work fast, requiring them to shoot documentary films on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday; edit them on Thursday and Friday; and show them on Saturday and Sunday. Lee became particularly close with two other undergraduate film majors, Monty Ross and George Folkes. "They said, 'We really want to make some changes,'" Herb Eichelberger recalled. "'We're tired of these woe-is-me films, the black always being the underdog and never getting even to break even on the silver screen.'"

For Lee's senior project, Eichelberger encouraged him to edit the footage he had shot in the summer of 1977. Lee turned it into a short feature that he called "Last Hustle in Brooklyn." The film was a mock-documentary that included scenes of New Yorkers trapped in elevators during the blackout and of people looting stores, as well as scenes acted out by Lee's younger siblings. By then, Lee had applied to the top film schools in the country—the first of Eichelberger's students to do so—and had been accepted at N.Y.U. At the time, there were only a handful of African-American directors in Hollywood, including Sidney Poitier, Gordon Parks, who directed the "Shaft" movies, and Michael Shultz, who made hits for Richard Pryor. Before that, the most successful black filmmaker was Melvin Van Peebles, who directed the 1970 feature "Watermelon Man," a pointed comedy about a white man who wakes up black and experiences racism firsthand. A year later, Van Peebles wrote, directed, and starred in "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song," a precursor to the seventies blaxploitation pictures. But Van Peebles was never embraced by Hollywood and went on to direct only several more low-budget features. "When I told people at Morehouse I was going to film school to become a filmmaker," Lee says, "they said that I was crazy."

The N.Y.U. film program is one of the best in the country. (The director Ang Lee was in Lee's class, Jim Jarmusch was there at the same time, and Joel Coen had graduated from the undergraduate film program a year earlier.) During his first year at N.Y.U., Lee was shown a number of classic movies by his professors, including the 1915 film "The Birth of a Nation," by D. W. Griffith, who pioneered many cinematic techniques still in use today. But the film was notorious, even at the time of its release, for its endorsement of white supremacy and its glorification of the Ku Klux Klan. (Griffith adapted the film from a novel by Thomas Dixon called "The Clansman.") Lee felt that his professors put too much emphasis on Griffith's artistry and not enough on the film's racist message. "They taught that

D.W. Griffith is the father of cinema," Lee told me. "They talk about all the 'innovations'—which he did. But they never really talked about the implications of 'Birth of a Nation,' never really talked about how that film was used as a recruiting tool for the K.K.K." For one of his freshman projects, Lee wrote and directed a twenty-minute movie called "The Answer," about an out-of-work African-American screenwriter who agrees to write a remake of "Birth of a Nation." The screenwriter ultimately decides that he cannot go through with the project and is attacked by Klan members, who burn a cross in front of his house.

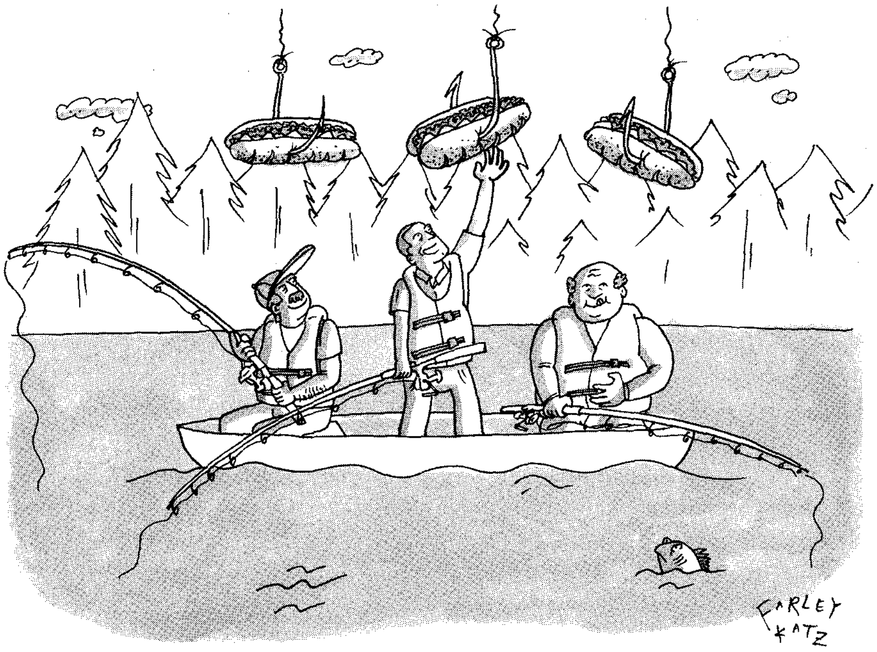
Lee declined to show me any of his student films ("They're out of circulation!" he said), but among those who saw "The Answer" was Ernest Dickerson. Lee and Dickerson met on the first day of classes at N.Y.U. and were two of only five African-American students at the film school. Dickerson described to me how, at the end of "The Answer," Lee's screenwriter turns on his attackers. "There's a really powerful image at the end," he said. "Low angle, shooting up the stairs—as the guy is going downstairs, knife in hand, to do battle. It fades out. It was an amazing film."

"The Answer" was shown at a screening of student films, and some members of the faculty were incensed. Roberta Hodes, a retired N.Y.U. film professor who took part in the debate over Lee's film, says that some faculty members recommended that he not be invited back for the final two years of the program. After the first year, the school weeded out students who lacked promise. But talent was not an issue with "The Answer," Hodes says. "I just think it offended everyone," she told me. "I felt offended, too, I'm ashamed to say." (She added, "I don't think he was very much liked. He was very fresh—as we used to say in the olden days—and very aggressive.") Eleanor Hamerow, another retired N.Y.U. professor, and a former head of the film department, also saw "The Answer." She said that the problem was not the film's content but, rather, its overweening ambition. "In first year, we're trying to teach them the basics, and certainly the idea was to execute exercises, make small films, but within limits," Hamerow told me. "He was trying to solve a problem overnight—the social problem with the blacks and the whites. He undertook to fix the great filmmaker who made that movie, D.W. Griffith. He was going to teach him a lesson." Hamerow says that she was among those faculty members who voted to keep Lee in the program, so that he could "go on and learn more." Both Lee and Dickerson, however, are convinced that it was the film's content that riled the faculty. "I think they just took offense to the fact that he was calling the film industry on the carpet as having racist policies," Dickerson says. "It's almost like they had to grudgingly bring him back."

Dickerson and Lee frequently went to the movies together at N.Y.U. "The films that always impressed us—that we talked about—were films that burn you, so you don't forget them," Dickerson recalled. They counted Martin Scorsese, Akira Kurosawa, and Francis Ford Coppola among their favorite directors. Dickerson became Lee's cameraman, and shot Lee's final-year project, a forty-five-minute film, "Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads." A comic crime caper, the movie was a hit with the faculty—"It was so alive and had such real characters that you usually don't see that," Hodes said—and it went on to win a Student Academy Award.

After graduation, Lee took a job at a small film-distribution company in the city and worked on the script of "Messenger," a semi-autobiographical feature about a bike messenger, but he abandoned the project for lack of funds in 1984. That year, Jim Jarmusch released "Stranger Than Paradise," a critical and commercial success, by the standards of independent cinema. "Jim Jarmusch was our hero," Lee told me. "When you're in film school, you study Scorsese, all these people—but you don't know them. But when somebody you know, who you saw in class and saw in school, makes it? Then it's doable. So we were all, like, 'Yeah, we can do it now!'"

In 1985, Lee wrote the screenplay for "She's Gotta Have It," about Nola Darling and her three suitors. Shot on the streets of Brooklyn and featuring a star turn by Lee as Mars Blackmon, a bespectacled and geeky would-be lover, the movie not only defied prevailing stereotypes of the Reagan-era inner-city black movie but called to mind Woody Allen's early romantic comedies, "Annie Hall" and "Manhattan." To help finance the movie—which cost a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars—he obtained a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts and seed money from his maternal grandmother, Zim-



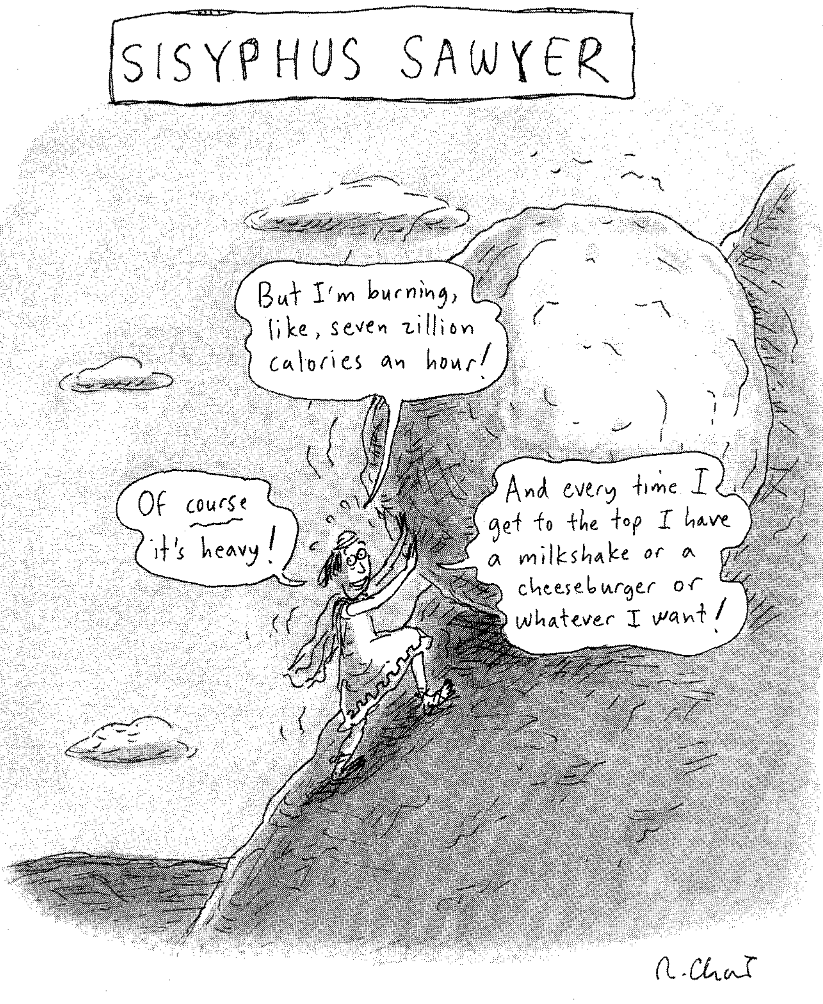
"Wow—free sky hoagies!"

• •

mie, a frugal woman who "saved her Social Security checks," Lee says, and had helped to pay for his tuition at Morehouse and N.Y.U. Lee shot the film, with Dickerson as cameraman, in twelve days. Despite the tiny budget and abbreviated shooting schedule, everything about the movie suggested a refined sensibility—from Dickerson's lush black-and-white camerawork to the sudden explosion of color in a dance number. ("Spike's love of musicals really contributed to the dance sequence," Dickerson says. "A lot of people don't know that Spike is a big fan of Hollywood musicals. Big Vincente Minnelli fan.") Lee's jump-cut editing was inspired by Jean-Luc Godard's "Breathless." "That film, when I saw it in film school, it really showed to me that 'Who are these people to make up these rules and say you can't do something?'" Lee told me. "Godard's, like, 'Fuck that, man, I'm trying this stuff.'" Lee's very funny performance as Mars Blackmon—in an oversized gold medallion and chain, a fade haircut, and huge, puffy Air Jordans—was an unexpected success. "I never wanted to act," Lee says. "The only reason I was in 'She's Gotta Have It' is that we couldn't afford to pay anyone else."

"She's Gotta Have It" premièred at the San Francisco Film Festival and prompted a bidding war for the distribution rights. It opened in the summer of 1986, with what Lee calls a "marketing gimmick": for nearly a month, the movie could be seen at only one theatre in America, Cinema Studio, at Sixty-sixth and Broadway. "Every night it was sold out," Lee recalled. "And I would get there and hand out buttons. Me and my friends were selling 'She's Gotta Have It' T-shirts." When the film opened in wide release, it made about seven million dollars. The credits announced the film as "A Spike Lee Joint." Lee told me, "From very early on—not that I was that sophisticated, but, coming from the independent world, I knew that millions and millions of dollars were not going to be spent on the promotion and marketing of my film. So in a lot of ways I had to market myself and market the brand of Spike Lee."

In 1988, Nike paired Lee's Mars Blackmon character with Michael Jordan in a series of television advertisements directed by Lee. He eventually directed and co-starred with Jordan in eight Nike commercials, which played around the world during the late eighties and early nineties. "There was a time when more people knew me as that crazy guy in those Nike commercials than knew I was Spike Lee, the director," Lee says. "She's Gotta Have It" also earned him the label of "the black Woody Allen." Lee was not happy with the comparison. "How can you say anybody is the black anybody after one film?" he said to me. "Look, I'm going to be honest," he went on. "There were some similarities. Both New Yorkers, both from Brooklyn, both loved the Knicks, both kinda small in stature and wear glasses, so. . . . I can see it. But that black Woody Allen thing? I was saying right away, 'No.' I was just trying to establish my own identity. Spike Lee."


SISYPHUS SAWYER
But I'm burning, like, seven zillion calories an hour!
Of course it's heavy!
And every time I get to the top I have a milkshake or a cheeseburger or whatever I want!
R. Chast

On the third day of recording the score for "Miracle at St. Anna," Lee arrived at the soundstage just before nine o'clock. He was wearing a T-shirt with the slogan "Defend Brooklyn!" and he was in an upbeat mood because the Lakers had won the night before. "Any day Boston loses is a great day!" he said. During a break in the session, Lee took Blanchard aside and told him a story in hushed tones, about an encounter he'd had with Jeffrey Katzenberg, Steven Spielberg, and Eddie Murphy at the Lakers game. "They were sitting together," Lee said. "I went to Spielberg, 'Steven, it's over with Clint Eastwood.' Steven laughed and said, 'I'll call Clint and tell him in the morning.' I said, 'It's over.' He said, 'Good.'"

Blanchard had known Lee too long to believe that he had uttered his final word on Eastwood—and told him so. "I don't see that shit happening," he said.

"No!" Lee insisted. "It's done!"

(Eastwood declined to comment for this article.)

As the day wore on, Lee became increasingly irritable, speaking little with his co-workers, and then only in brief, truculent commands. He stood, stretched his neck, and yawned. During a dinner break, when Blanchard and other members of the team sat in the control room talking and eating sushi and sashimi, Lee sat apart, his back to the room, reading the newspaper and picking at some cooked shrimp. He took a small sip from a glass of red wine. Blanchard tried to draw him into conversation, mentioning the comedy "Swingers." Lee said peremptorily, "I never saw it," and resumed reading.

A few minutes later, Lee received a call on his BlackBerry from his family in New York. Since 1994, he has been married to Tonya Lewis Lee, a former corporate lawyer who is now a writer and a television producer and the co-author of "The Gotham Diaries," a novel about upper-class black women in Manhattan. The Lees have a daughter, Satchel, thirteen, and a son, Jackson, eleven. Ten years ago, they bought a ninety-six-hundred-square-foot town house on the Upper East Side that used to belong to the painter Jasper Johns and, before that, to Gypsy Rose Lee. "The Upper East Side is the last place I wanted to live," Lee told me. (The family has also lived in Brooklyn and, briefly, in SoHo.) "But we saw this house and said, 'We getting it!' The value has gone up four times since." The Lees also have a home on Martha's Vineyard, and their children attend private schools on the Upper East Side, a fact that seems to cause Lee some discomfort when he discloses it. He told me that he had always intended his kids to go, as he did, to public schools. (In a 1991 interview, he called private schools "too sheltered.") "But my wife put the kibosh on that," he said. Lee balks at being described as wealthy. "It's not rich rich," he told me. "Rich is Spielberg. Lucas. Gates. Steve Jobs. Jay-Z! Bruce Springsteen. I'm not complaining. But that's money. Will Smith. Tyler Perry. Oprah Winfrey—that's a ton of money. Compared to them, I'm on welfare!"

Jackson Lee was on the phone, telling his dad about a recent Little League game. Lee's bad mood disappeared as he paced up and down the control room and spoke loudly into the phone. "How'd you do?" he asked. "You slid under the tag? Everyone came and gave you a high five?" Lee asked several more questions about the game, then said, "Tomorrow is your last day of school. Tell Mommy to let you watch the game. Tell Mommy you wanna watch the Lakers kick the Celtics' butts!" Then Lee lowered his voice. "We have to talk about that grammar stuff when I get back," he said, before hanging up. "All right. I'm not mad at you. All right."

"He hurt his arm, so he can't pitch," Lee told Blanchard. "We took him to the Knicks' doctor. He has 'Little League elbow.'"

"Was he throwing curveballs?" Blanchard asked.

"No, he was throwing hard," Lee said. He sat and again became absorbed in his newspaper. But when the conversation turned to politics he looked up.

"With this election, we're gonna find out who's really liberal," Blanchard, an Obama supporter, was saying to the others. "You got people saying they're not going to vote for my man because he lacks experience. You know that's not it!"

"You know, Donna Brazile still hasn't declared herself?" Lee said, bitterly.

Frank Wolf, the sound mixer, said, "She's a superdelegate."

"That's what I'm talking about," Lee said.

"Who's going to be the Vice-Presidential pick?" Robin Burgess, the session coördinator and Blanchard's wife, asked.

"As long as it's not Hillary," Lee said.

"You know," Blanchard said in a wondering tone, "we got friends uptown who say they can't stand Michelle. I mean, what about McCain's wife?"

"Stepford wife," Lee muttered.

"I used to like Bill Clinton," Blanchard said.

Lee shook his head. "They showed their hand," he said.

Lee has always been intensely interested in electoral politics and believes that the cultural and financial status of African-Americans is dictated by the policies and attitudes of the politicians in power. He blames Ed Koch, the mayor of New York City from 1978 to 1989, for fostering a toxic racial climate. Lee was particularly outraged by two violent incidents in the mid-eighties involving the killing of unarmed blacks by white policemen, who were not convicted of any crime. In December, 1986, three black youths were assaulted by a mob of white men wielding a baseball bat and sticks in Howard Beach, an Italian-American neighborhood of Queens, where they had walked to a pizza parlor after their car broke down nearby. One youth was run over by a car as he fled his attackers. Three of the white assailants were convicted of manslaughter in the winter of 1987, but the city remained tense. Within weeks of the Howard Beach verdict, Lee began writing his third feature, a movie that brilliantly compressed the volatile state of race relations in New York—and, by extension, the nation—into a single day on a single city block.

He set "Do the Right Thing" on the hottest day of the summer in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a black neighborhood with a lone Italian-American outpost: Sal's Famous Pizzeria. Frictions between the pizzeria's white owners and its black customers build until Sal, played by Danny Aiello, demands that a black youth, Radio Raheem, turn off the boom box on which he constantly plays Public Enemy's "Fight the Power." Raheem refuses, Sal smashes the boom box with a bat, and the ensuing altercation results in the arrival of white police officers. They execute a restraint hold on Raheem and choke him to death. Soon after, Sal's delivery man, Mookie—played by Lee and until this point the only character who bridged the white and black worlds—throws a garbage can through the pizzeria's front window and sparks a riot. The movie ends with two quotations: a plea for nonviolence from Martin Luther King—"The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind"—followed by a quite different sentiment from Malcolm X: "I am not against using violence in self-defense. I don't even call it violence when it's self-defense, I call it intelligence."

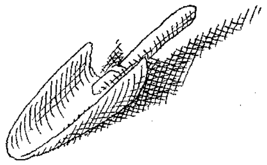
When the movie débuted, at Cannes, in May, 1989, Lee was asked, at a packed press conference, why he ended it with Malcolm X rather than with King. "I think that in certain times both philosophies and approaches can be appropriate," he said. "But in this day and age, in the Year of Our Lord 1989, I'm leaning more towards the philosophies of Malcolm X." He added, "When you're being beat upside the head with a brick, I don't think that young black America is just going to turn their cheek and say, 'Thank you, Jesus, for hitting me upside the head with this brick.'" The film caused a furor when it opened. The *Times* convened a panel discussion that included Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Betty Shabazz, Malcolm X's widow, to address "issues raised by the film." Stanley Crouch's scathing review in the *Village Voice* was titled "Do the Race Thing: Spike Lee's Afro-Fascist Chic," and accused Lee of immaturity and propagandizing for black nationalism. In fact, Lee is as hard on the film's black characters for their political apathy as he is on the pizzeria owner, Sal, who is scarcely a one-dimensional race baiter; "Do the Right Thing" is inarguably among the most thoughtful and unsentimental meditations on race relations committed to film. Scorsese calls it "a wonderful film, a tough picture that puts it right out there." The *Times* praised it as an "astounding political and moral drama."

"Do the Right Thing" changed the public perception of Lee. From the "black Woody Allen," he became a kind of Malcolm X of American cinema. "After 'Do the Right Thing,' it was 'He wants to throw garbage cans and burn down every pizzeria in America,'" Lee says. His subsequent films were controversial even when he did not intend them to be. "Mo' Better Blues," his next feature, was an attempt, inspired by his musician father, to defy stereotypes about black jazz artists as self-destructive drug addicts. But the movie included two venal Jewish club owners, Moe and Josh Flatbush (played by John Turturro and his younger brother, Nicholas), who exploit the film's black jazz musicians, played by Denzel Washington and Wesley Snipes. Lee says that he was shocked when critics characterized the portrayal of the club owners as anti-Semitic. According to Lee, his lawyer at the time, Arthur Klein, who has since died, told him, "This could really hurt your career. You better write an Op-Ed piece in the New York *Times*." Lee's piece, published in the summer of 1990 and titled "I Am Not an Anti-Semite," was combative. "I challenge anyone to tell me why I can't portray two club owners who happen to be Jewish and who exploit the black jazz musicians who work for them," Lee wrote. "All Jewish club owners are not like this, that's true, but these two are."

Lee is still angry about the accusations. "They're, like, 'So, Spike, are you saying that every single Jewish person is a crook?'" he told me. "Get the fuck out of here! That's crazy."

When Lee and Dickerson were in film school, they often discussed their ideal movie project. "For both of us, it was to try to do an adaptation of 'The Autobiography of Malcolm X,'" Dickerson says. Lee had first read the book in junior high school and later called it the "most important book I'll ever read," saying that it "changed the way I thought; it changed the way I acted." In 1990, Lee learned that the director Norman Jewison was going to make a movie about Malcolm X for the producer Marvin Worth, who had bought the rights to Malcolm's autobiography. Jewison had worked on the movie for almost a year, securing Denzel Washington for the lead role, digging up F.B.I. transcripts, and writing a script. Lee did not believe that a white director was up to the task—and said so in the press. Jewison told me, "I feel that he had pulled the race card, so I met with him." According to Jewison, at the meeting Lee said that a white director lacked "the deep understanding of the black psyche" necessary for the project. Jewison agreed to turn the movie over to Lee, who rewrote the script and began filming in 1991.

The production was fraught with problems. "We were trying to make a better movie than Warner Bros. wanted," Dickerson, who was the cinematographer, says. "For the Egypt scenes, Warner Bros.'s attitude was 'We don't need to send you guys to Egypt, just go to South Jersey, shoot on the beach, get some place with some sand, and do matte paintings of the pyramids and everything.' And they wanted a two-hour movie. There's no way you can condense a man whose life was as complex as Malcolm's into two hours." Lee refused to compromise, and eventually went to prominent members of the black community for money to complete the film as he envisioned it. Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jackson, Prince, Janet Jackson, Tracy Chapman, Magic Johnson, and Michael Jordan all contributed money to the movie, which ran three hours and included a sequence shot on location in Egypt. The film documented Malcolm's early castigation of white people as "blue-eyed devils," but artfully traced the spiritual development that led him to achieve a broader sympathy, even for whites. "Malcolm X" was released in the fall of 1992 to mixed reviews and a disappointing box-office take of about ten million dollars in its first weekend.



Through the rest of the nineties and into this decade, box-office returns for Lee's films followed a steady downward trend. "Clockers," Lee's 1995 adaptation of Richard Price's novel about a young black drug dealer (played by Mekhi Phifer), took in slightly more than thirteen million dollars at the box office. "Girl 6," the closest Lee has come to making a light comedy since "She's Gotta Have It," took in less than five million. In 1998, he released "He Got Game," for which he wrote the screenplay—his first since "Jungle Fever." The movie was an affecting melodrama about a killer (Denzel Washington) who is offered a reduced sentence in exchange for persuading his estranged son, a high-school basketball star, to sign with "Big State University." It won praise, even from Stanley Crouch, but took in only about twenty million at the box office. "Summer of Sam," Lee's bravura re-creation of the dismal summer of 1977—a film that Scorsese calls "excellent," and which deserved to be a commercial success—also failed to become a hit. In 2000, he wrote "Bamboozled," a bitter satire about down-and-out African-American actors performing a hit TV show in blackface. The film lashed out indiscriminately at anyone whom Lee perceived to be exploiting black people—including the fashion designer Tommy Hilfiger (who appeared as a character called Timmi Hillnigger) and gangsta-rap groups. (An avowed fan of hip-hop, Lee has nevertheless criticized 50 Cent and other rappers for promoting violence in black communities. "I try not to listen to gangsta rap," he told me. "It's not helping.") Lee shot "Bamboozled" on a shoestring budget, with Sony digital handicams, often using up to ten cameras at a time to capture the action. The movie took in just over two million dollars. Lee's visibility as a feature-film director had shrunk dramatically. "It got to where people would come up to me and say, 'Hey, when's your next movie coming out?'—and I had one opening the next day," Lee recalled.

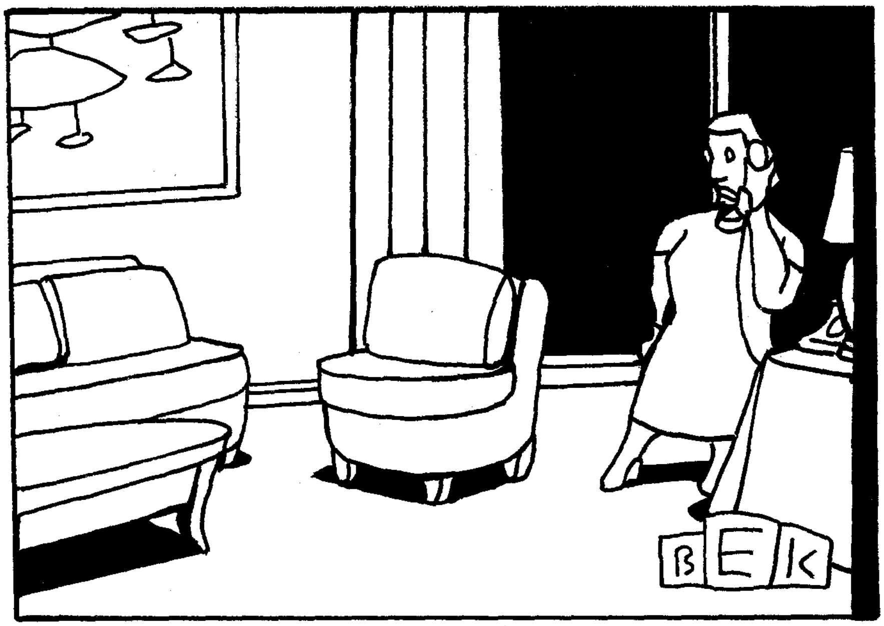
In 1997, Lee criticized Quentin Tarantino, for his use of the word "nigger" in his movies. "I want Quentin to know that all African Americans do not think that word is trendy or slick," Lee told *Variety*. Samuel L. Jackson, the star of Tarantino's "Jackie Brown," defended the director, telling reporters at the Berlin Film Festival that the movie was "a wonderful homage to black exploitation films. This is a good film, and Spike hasn't made one of those in a few years." (Jackson had appeared in "Do the Right Thing" and, in a stunning performance, played a crack addict in "Jungle Fever.") Lee responded by telling the Washington *Post* that Jackson's support for Tarantino was like a "house Negro defending massa"—one of his favorite taunts to African-Americans against whom he has a grudge. (Lee says that he was misquoted.) He is scathing on the subject of Robert L. Johnson, the African-American billionaire businessman and founder of Black Entertainment Television, who supported Hillary Clinton's candidacy over Barack Obama's. "Bob Johnson's relatives, in slavery, his relatives were in the house," Lee told me. "They were called house Negroes. . . . 'Massa, them niggers about to uprise! What we gonna do?'" (In an e-mail to me, Johnson wrote, "Spike Lee's juvenile ranting does not warrant my attention or a response.")

During this time, however, Lee also made an acclaimed documentary. In 1997, he released "4 Little Girls," about the 1963 bombing of a Baptist church in Birmingham, Alabama, by members of the Ku Klux Klan—an act that helped to galvanize the civil-rights movement. The film is notable for its emotional restraint; its outrage and grief are channelled through interviews with the dead girls' parents. It was nominated for an Oscar for best feature-length documentary. "There was something about the dignity of those people he encountered when he was making '4 Little Girls' that had a very deep impact on him, and in some way they seemed to help him grow up," Stanley Crouch told me. "When you got kids yourself and you're talking to the father of someone whose child was blown up by the kind of people who blew those kids up, and you see that this person is not ranting and raving in some kind of theatrical purported rage of the sort that you see in 'Do the Right Thing.'" (Lee is less restrained in comments that accompany the DVD for "4 Little Girls," in which he carps about losing the Oscar to "Into the Arms of Strangers," a documentary about the effort to rescue Jewish children from the Nazis. "When I found out that one of the films—one of the other five films nominated—was a film about the Holocaust, I knew we lost," he says.)

In 2006, Lee made "When the Levees Broke," a four-hour documentary for HBO about Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. He did not visit New Orleans until almost three months after the storm—he was finishing post-production on "Inside Man"—but ultimately he made eight trips to the city over six months and shot more than a hundred interviews with survivors. The film catalogues the egregious federal response to the crisis, but its chief power is its record of the toll on the city's residents. (Lee filmed Blanchard tenderly escorting his elderly mother to her house in New Orleans months after the storm. She sobs when she sees that everything has been destroyed by the floodwaters.) Lee was criticized for including the testimony of some New Orleans residents who said that they had heard explosions before the levees gave way, thus lending credibility to conspiracy theorists who believe that the government dynamited the levees, drowning the city's impoverished Lower Ninth Ward in order to spare wealthy parts of town. Lee argued that it was his "duty" as a filmmaker to present these witnesses' statements, and pointed out that he included other possible explanations for what they had heard. The film also features an interview with the historian Douglas Brinkley, who calls the bombing an "urban myth." Even so, on the DVD's commentary track, Lee said, "Many African-Americans—and I include myself in this group—don't put anything past the United States government when it comes to black people."

The success of "Inside Man," in 2006, marked an upturn in his fortunes. "I got slipped the script," he told me. "It had been dormant at Imagine Entertainment, Ron Howard and Brian Grazer's company. I said I'd like to do this."

As Grazer recalled, "He said, 'I want to do this movie and I want to do it now, and I'll do it really well.' He was so committed that it was intoxicating." Grazer wasn't particularly troubled that Lee had recently been making small movies. "I'd hired directors—great directors—that



"You never write, you never call, you never fax, you never e-mail, you never text, you never page."

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weren't at the highest moment of their career," he told me. "What mattered to me was that in every movie, whether it was 'Bamboozled' or 'Malcolm X' or 'Do the Right Thing,' he always shot good scenes. He always had good taste." Grazer was more concerned about Lee's combativeness. "There are executives within the structural establishment that felt, 'Hey, we're not sure we wanna hire Spike Lee,'" Grazer said. "But I just felt he'd be perfect for our movie."

Lee was given a forty-five-million-dollar budget for the film, which was shot in downtown New York, with Clive Owen, Jodie Foster, and Denzel Washington in the lead roles. Lee made the movie look like a hundred-million-dollar Hollywood blockbuster, with his signature fluid camera moves, Blanchard's gorgeous score, and a twisty plot that was a clever deconstruction of the heist film: Owens's bank-robber character is not robbing the bank after all. Lee also wrote a few race-conscious passages into the script, including one in which a Sikh is taken hostage in the bank. Released by Owens, the turbaned character is set upon by the police, who panic, call him a "fuckin' Arab," and haul him away. Lee says that he knew the film was going to be a hit, but he didn't know how big. It grossed a hundred and seventy-six million dollars worldwide, a record for Lee, and he immediately began planning to shoot two pet projects—one about the life of James Brown, the other about the riots in Los Angeles sparked by the acquittals of the police officers who beat Rodney King.

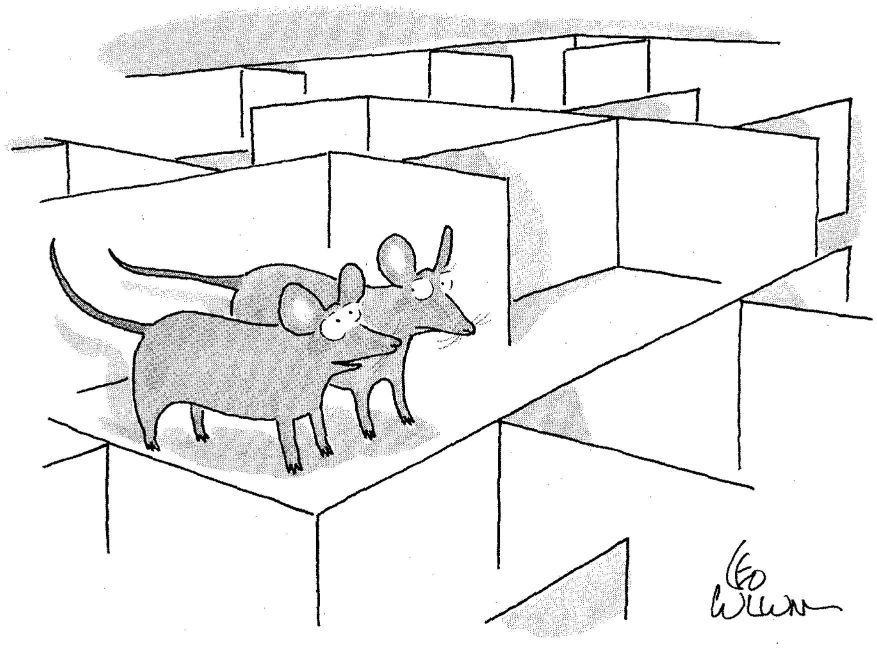
"But I could not get the financing for those films," Lee says. "I deluded myself into thinking that I have a little more leeway after my biggest hit." Instead, Lee decided to try to put "Miracle at St. Anna" into production, but again was unable to secure funding from the Hollywood studios. Eventually, he raised the money from European sources. "RAI Cinema bought the rights for Italy. TF1 International is a French company—they bought the French rights and then sold them to the rest of the world," Lee said. "And Touchstone Pictures came on last, as American distributor."

Lee is philosophical about the difficulty he has had funding his latest projects. "The people who can get films made are Spielberg, Lucas, cats like that," he told me. "Whatever they want to do, they get made. Everybody else? It's a battle. Woody Allen has not made his last three or four films in England and his last one in Barcelona by choice. He had to go where the financing was." Even Scorsese, Lee says, has had to adapt to the realities of present-day Hollywood, casting Leonardo DiCaprio in lead roles in order to raise money. "If Leonardo's in it, it gets made," Lee said. He added, "The reality is that unless you're doing a comic-book superhero or some fourth or fifth sequel, it's hard to get stuff made, especially stuff that's different."

Scorsese told me that financial obstacles are not unusual for established directors with a personal vision, like Lee or Robert Altman, or Scorsese himself. "Sometimes these things go in cycles," Scorsese said. "Particularly if your films are more subjective, more personal points of view. After 'The King of Comedy,' I wound up going back to a low-budget independent cinema with 'After Hours,' then ratcheting it up just a little bit more with 'The Color of Money' and then going back to independent with 'The Last Temptation of Christ' and then finally getting back into a kind of a fighting shape with 'Goodfellas.' So in a way you have to go off and explore. Some people don't come back." He added, "It sort of separates the men from the boys, the ones who keep going. And he has kept going and he's not going to take no for an answer. Which is great."

In early August, Lee flew to Los Angeles, where he spent a few days overseeing the final color corrections on "Miracle at St. Anna." (It opens later this month.) When he returned to New York, on August 7th, we met in midtown, on Madison Avenue at Forty-eighth Street. Lee was wearing a white Ralph Lauren sweat jacket with the word "Beijing" across the back and the Olympics logo on the front. "Let's walk," he said, and started up Madison, moving at a good pace.

To walk with Lee in midtown Manhattan is to experience the metropolis reduced to a small town. Every species of New Yorker—from homeless people to businessmen in pin-striped suits—recognized and hailed him. Passing cabdrivers shouted, "Spike!" Bicyclists, pedestrians, people waiting at bus stops, elderly white ladies smiled and nodded hello. Lee acknowledged them all with an expressionless nod of the head, or a quickly raised right hand. Two white women smoking in front of a building managed to talk him into posing for a cell-phone photograph, and a nine-year-old African-American boy got Lee to sign a baseball-size rubber ball painted like a basketball. Lee wrote in careful letters, "To Paul, Love Spike Lee." At Fifty-seventh Street, Lee charged across



"Sure, I want out, but I also want to enjoy the journey."

a red light. As he approached the Niketown store, down the block, Lee noticed that a crowd of young men had collected on the sidewalk. "Sneakerheads," as Lee calls them, have been known to camp out in front of the stores for up to a week when the company introduces a new shoe. "Yo!" Lee shouted. "I got to find out what this is!" He hurried over.

The kids, some of whom had set up camp chairs, did a double take, then exclaimed in disbelief, "Spike!"

Lee shook their hands. "What's about to drop?" he asked.

"Tomorrow. Questlove's Nike Air," a white kid replied. Questlove is the drummer for the hip-hop band the Roots.

"Say, Spike—when is the new Spi'zike coming out?" another kid asked. Spi'zike is the name of a limited-edition sneaker—a mash-up of several early styles of Air Jordan—released by Nike in 2007 in honor of Lee's Mars Blackmon commercials. Lee told the kids that a new black-and-gold version was going to be out soon.

"The black-and-gold is out in Europe," one of the kids said.

"What?" Lee said. "No, it's not."

"I got a picture," the kid said, waving his BlackBerry. He showed Lee a photograph he had taken of the black-and-gold Spi'zike.

"Shit," Lee said. "I gotta make a call." He took out his BlackBerry and dialled the number of his contact at Nike. He got voice mail and hung up. "How long you been out here?" he asked the kids.

"Four days," the kids said.

Lee headed north and then west on Fifty-ninth Street until he got to Mickey Mantle's, a sports bar and restaurant. He stepped inside, declared the room "too noisy," and sat down at a small table on the sidewalk. Lee ordered a strawberry virgin daiquiri. A heavyset African-American teen-ager appeared beside the table, carrying a crumpled box of M&M's. The boy did not seem to recognize Lee. He asked Lee to buy some candy to "support our football team."

"How old are you?" Lee asked.

"Fifteen, sir."

"What's your name?"

"My name's Tashon."

"What's your last name?"

The kid told him.

"Where you living?" Lee said.

"Jersey City."

"How'd you get over here?

"The train, sir."

"PATH train?"

"Yes, sir."

Lee asked what grade the boy was going into, what his grades were like, if he planned to go to college ("I might go to Rutgers"), what position he played, and how tall he was. Eventually, he asked, "You on the straight and narrow?" to which the boy replied, "Yes." Lee pulled a five-dollar bill from his pocket. "All right," he said, "take it." The boy took it and left.

On the evening of Hillary Clinton's concession speech, Lee had sent me a two-word text message: "Changes everything." I now asked him what he meant. "Changes the whole dynamic," he said. "If we have a black President, maybe it will change people's psyche." Specifically, he meant African-Americans. He went on, "They don't have to be shuckin' and jivin'—doing the tap dance—to make a living. And I mean that 'tap dancing' figuratively, not literally, because no disrespect to the world's greatest tap dancer, Savion Glover." I asked Lee about the debate in the mainstream press over Obama's blackness. (*Time* had run a story in February, 2007, titled "Is Obama Black Enough?" and the question had since been taken up by CNN, CBS News, the Washington *Post*, and other news organizations.) He snorted.

"It's ignorance," he said. "Here's the thing. I'm not one of these people who're going to be defined by the ghetto mentality, that you have to have been shot, have numerous babies from many women, be ignorant, getting high all the time, walking around with pants hanging from your ass—and that's a black man? I'm not buying that. That's not my definition. Are there some black people like that? Yes. But if one speaks proper English, wears a shirt and a tie—"

Lee was suddenly distracted by someone across the street. In a booming voice, he yelled, "What's up, Nick?"

Stopped in traffic, in a silver S.U.V. with the driver's window down, was Nicholas Turturro, who played one of the Jewish jazz-club owners in "Mo' Better Blues" and has appeared in several of Lee's other films.

"Yo, buddy! Like the hat!" Turturro shouted, pointing at Lee's Yankees cap, which featured a pattern of winning pennants.

"What size you wear?" Lee bellowed.

"I got one already!"

"Got one? You gotta get one for your brother! Time is running out!"

Turturro drove off, and Lee resumed talking about Obama's run for President. "This thing is not by accident," he said. "I think this thing is ordained—it's providence. This is a sweeping movement. It's bigger than him, it's bigger than all of us. I think this is going to be such a pivotal moment in history that you can measure time by B.B., Before Barack, and A.B., After Barack. That's what I feel is going to happen." He went on, "There's ramifications all over the world. I mean, I know this is a Presidential election for the United States of America, but this thing is worldwide news. It's not like they rang every door in Berlin to say, 'Barack's going to be here,' for two hundred thousand people to show up. Two hundred thousand can come to see McCain but they're going to be protesting, and burning American flags and who knows what else?" He laughed. "If we were talking about two boxers, Muhammad Ali would say, 'He's too old, and he's too slow!' And he would say, 'I'm too young and too pretty and too fast.'" Lee clapped his hands.

In our earlier conversations, I had tried several times to get Lee to say whether he, routinely held up as an exemplar of the angry, activist black artist, felt out of step in the supposedly "post-racial" world embodied by Obama. He had dodged or ignored my questions. But he seemed to offer an oblique answer when I asked if he had thought about making a television commercial for Obama's campaign. After all, Obama and his wife had gone to see "Do the Right Thing" on their first date, in 1989, and then had discussed Mookie's act of throwing the garbage can through Sal's window.

"You gotta be asked to do that stuff," Lee said. "Look, if they need me, they know where I am. And in a lot of ways they might—" He paused. "You know, that shit could be used against them, too. 'Spike Lee, the man who said so-and-so and so-and-so. Now he's doing commercials for—'" He shrugged and smiled. "Sometimes you might be a liability," he said finally. "Just got to lay in the cut." ♦

LETTER FROM ALASKA

THE STATE OF SARAH PALIN

The peculiar political landscape of the Vice-Presidential hopeful.

BY PHILIP GOUREVITCH

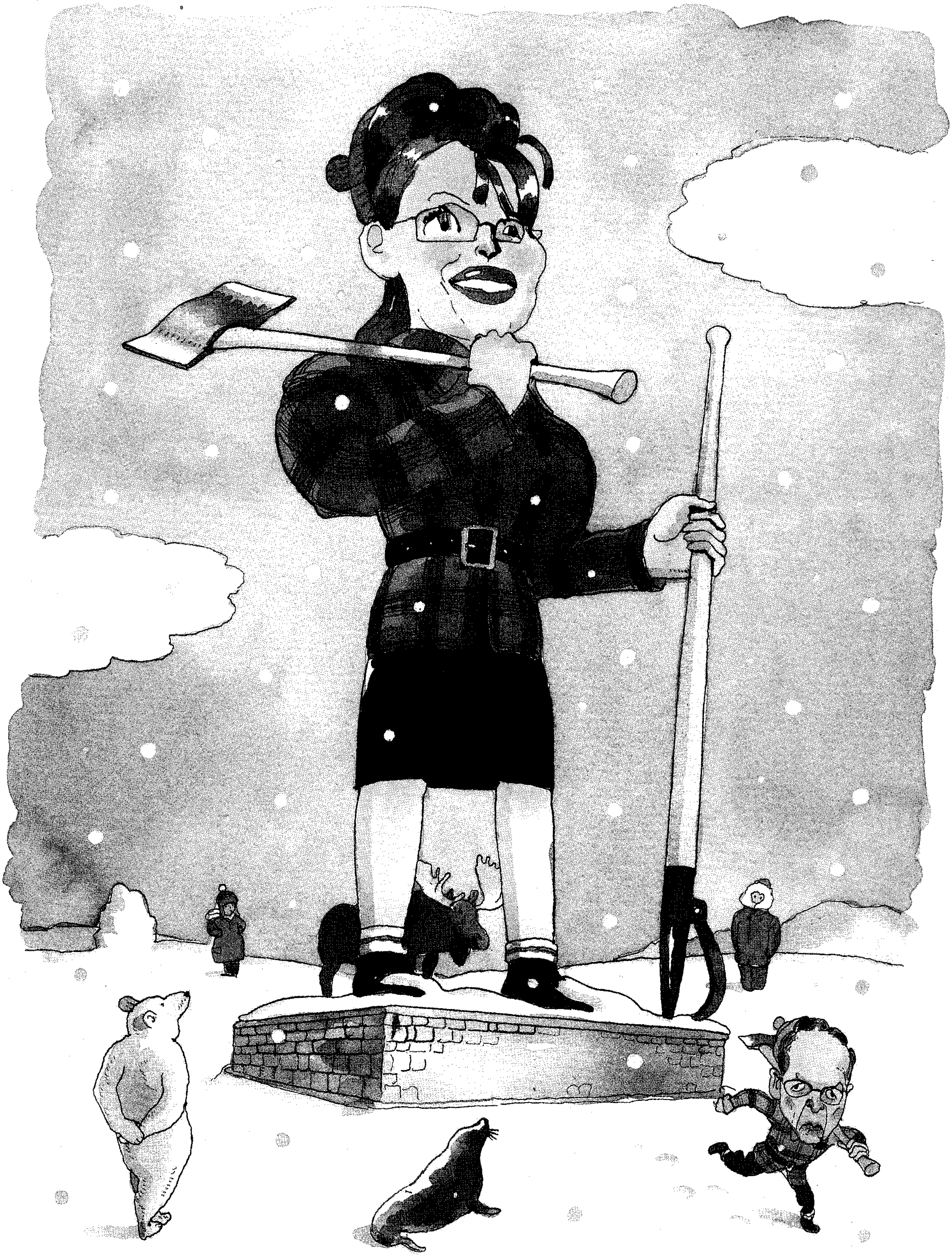
It rained a lot in Alaska this summer—even more than usual—and it was a cold summer, too. The sun doesn't set on much of the state between mid-June and mid-July, but the weather was such that if you came from Outside, which is how Alaskans refer to the rest of the United States, and you happened to visit on a day that was fair, people would thank you for bringing the sunshine. If you were there to inquire into the political situation, people thanked you for that, too. They thanked you for coming, for hearing them out, and for not treating their story as a national joke. Many Alaskans enjoy being disconnected from the Lower Forty-eight, which is sometimes referred to as if it were a foreign country. There is pride in this sense of apartness, and that pride has been stung repeatedly since 2006, when the F.B.I. began raiding state lawmakers' offices in an ever-expanding anti-corruption campaign. There have been indictments and guilty pleas. Oil-industry executives who were caught on videotape in the Baranof Hotel, in Juneau, the state capital, giving cash handouts to a state legislator have coöperated in pointing out other state legislators who liked to get paid before voting on oil-industry tax rates. Last year, the F.B.I. hit the home of Ted Stevens, Alaska's six-term senator, and he became a favorite figure of ridicule on "The Daily Show": an angry little man, with an uncanny resemblance to Mr. Magoo, who had once made himself seem even older than his eighty-plus years by describing the Internet as "a series of tubes"; Jon Stewart called him a "coot," and portrayed him as a bully and a crook. As I travelled around Alaska in mid-August, Alaskans wanted me to understand that, sadly, he might well be all of that—and a very good thing for the state, too.

I booked a flight to the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport shortly after Stevens was indicted on, and pleaded not guilty to, seven felony charges for failing to report more than a quarter of a million dollars in gifts from the same oilmen who had bought much of the state legislature. I had to change planes in Las Vegas, but when I got there I was told that my flight to Anchorage had been cancelled, on account of a volcano in the Aleutian Islands that had erupted and "burped"—the technical term—a gigantic cloud of ash into the lower stratosphere. The cloud had drifted in a northeasterly direction and occupied much of the airspace over the Gulf of Alaska. More than five thousand travellers were stranded as a result. The next day, when the cloud moved and I completed my journey, I learned that, after a similar belch of ash choked out all four engines of a K.L.M. flight into Anchorage in 1989, Ted Stevens finagled an earmark on an appropriations bill to secure federal funds for the Alaska Volcano Observatory, whose missions included the monitoring of volcanic activity and its attendant hazards. The Alaska Volcano Observatory became a punch line on "The West Wing," mocked as a ludicrous example of congressional pork, which is how it might sound until you think about your plane crashing.

So Ted Stevens may have saved my life—and that was something a great many Alaskans could say as they looked about at the roads and bridges, the hospitals and flood-control systems, the satellite weather and global-positioning relay stations, the sprawling Army and Air Force bases, the rural landing strips and postal air-cargo flights that sustain existence in Alaska as it enters its fiftieth year of statehood. Much of this infrastructure was the result of Stevens's work on the Senate Appropriations and Armed Services Committees, and he made no apologies for his transactional approach to politics. On the contrary, as he brought Alaska the highest number of federal dollars per capita in the nation, he boasted that he was doing his job. Still, Stevens's decision to launch a reëlection campaign in the middle of a federal investigation required more than ordinary moxie.

The oilman at the center of the corruption scandal, Bill Allen, had agreed to testify against Stevens. The two men had once shared ownership of a racehorse, and had counted themselves good friends. Allen, a former welder and oilfield superintendent who came to Alaska from Texas and built a billion-dollar oilfield-services company, Veco Corporation, liked to be around other powerful men. He liked them to need him, and he had already claimed under oath that he had bribed Stevens's son, Ben, a former state senator with a reputation for profiteering from government contracts his father had a hand in. For instance, Ben Stevens had received seven hundred and fifteen thousand dollars over three years from the Special Olympics, as the chief executive of the 2001 Winter Games in Anchorage, for which his father had brought millions of dollars in federal aid. Conflicted interests also hung heavily over Ben Stevens's dealings regarding Alaska's fisheries. He has said that he has done nothing illegal, yet the speculation in Alaska was not whether, but when, indictments would drop on him, and how they might affect his father's fate. (Everyone was waiting, too, for charges to be filed against the state's only congressman, Don Young, a man so ornery that he makes Stevens look affable. Young, who is seventy-five and has been in office almost as long as Stevens, was also running for reëlection, and he had so far spent more than a million dollars

BARRY BLITT



Palin was elected governor just as the corruption scandal broke, and quickly took the opportunity to proclaim herself a reformer.

from his campaign war chest on lawyers, an expense that he would not explain except to say that being investigated gets pricey.)

With so much trouble encompassing Stevens, the desire for a seventh term had a brazen air of unreality about it. At his age? Why not go gently? That would not be the way of Ted Stevens, the dominant figure of Alaska's fifty-year existence as a state. He is a man given to rages—he has said that they are an effective way to get what he wanted, and "I don't lose my temper. I always know where it is." He is also a man used to having enormous clout. On the eve of the millennium, he was named "Alaskan of the century," and he is known as Alaska's Senator-for-Life. Before his last run for office, he told the Anchorage newspaperman Michael Carey, "I just want people to understand the commitment I'm making if I stay on. This is a period I could go out and make a million dollars a year, without any question." Stevens had by then made a lot of people rich. Evidently, he felt underpaid, and Bill Allen had been there to help out. This time around, his humble pitch to voters is: I've always been there for you; now I need you to come through for me.

"It's the most momentous political season I've lived through in Alaska," Pat Dougherty, the editor of the Anchorage *Daily News*, the state's largest newspaper, told me—and that was three weeks before the governor, Sarah Palin, became the human cannonball of the Presidential campaign and blasted into overlapping orbits of political and tabloid super-celebrity. Just about everyone in Alaska knew that Palin was on John McCain's list of potential running mates, but no one in the state's insular, Republican political world had seen any indication that the campaign was checking her background. That made sense to Dougherty. Palin was forty-four years old and had served only a year and a half as governor, and he said, "The idea of her as Vice-President is ridiculous. She'd be way in over her head."

Then again, two years ago Dougherty hadn't considered Palin ready to be governor, even after she prevailed in the Republican primary against the deeply unpopular incumbent, Frank Murkowski, who had previously spent twenty-two years as Alaska's junior senator. "We endorsed the Democrat in her race," he said. "We didn't think she had the experience." Looking back, Dougherty allowed that he had underestimated Palin. After twenty months in office, she enjoyed an eighty-per-cent approval rating—the highest in the nation—and although he said he wouldn't yet call himself an admirer, he described her performance as "great spectator sport." Dougherty was particularly impressed by her tough, you-deal-with-Alaska-on-Alaska's-terms attitude toward the big oil producers on whom the state's economy largely depends.

Palin was elected governor just as Alaska's political establishment was being realigned by the Veco bribery scandal. She had no role in exposing the corruption, but she was swift to see opportunity in the moment of crisis. The tainted politicians were being held to account, but hostility to the oil companies behind the corruption remained high. Since the nineteen-seventies, and the construction of the Trans-Alaska oil pipeline, major oil producers had enjoyed extraordinary influence over Alaskan lawmakers, and had pretty much dictated the terms on which they did business with the state. Under Frank Murkowski, the big oil companies had negotiated terms for the construction of a new pipeline that would allow for the extraction and conveyance to market of thirty-five trillion cubic feet of natural gas from Alaska's North Slope; and it was in the context of the legislature's votes on the gas pipeline that the F.B.I. had begun its corruption sting. When Palin arrived on the scene, Murkowski's gas-line deal was dead, and she adopted another approach, cutting out the big oil producers in favor of a Canadian pipeline company. She counted it a great victory when, this summer, the legislature approved a framework for proceeding with the project.

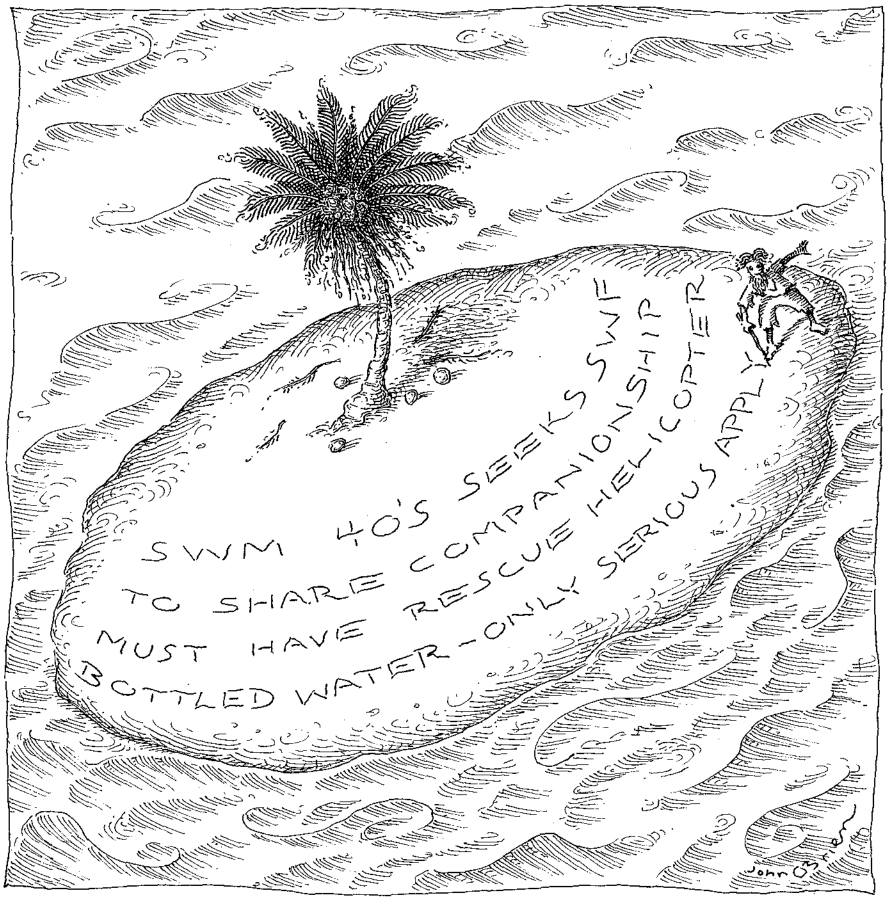
"We're not just gonna concede to three big oil companies of this monopoly—Exxon, B.P., ConocoPhillips—and beg them to do this for Alaska," Palin told me last month in Juneau. "We're gonna say, 'O.K., this is so economic that we

"Your early stuff was funnier."

don't have to incentivize you to build this. In fact, this has got to be a mutually beneficial partnership here as we build it. We're gonna lay out Alaska's must-haves. Parameters are gonna be set, rules are gonna be laid out, a law will encompass what it is that Alaska needs to protect our sovereignty, to insure it's jobs first for Alaskans, and in-state use of gas' "—her list went on. In the past, she said, "Alaska was conceding too much, and chipping away at our sovereignty. And Alaska—we're set up, unlike other states in the union, where it's collectively Alaskans own the resources. So we share in the wealth when the development of these resources occurs." And she said, "Our state constitution—it lays it out for me, how I'm to conduct business with resource development here as the state C.E.O. It's to maximize benefits for Alaskans, not an individual company, not some multinational somewhere, but for Alaskans."

Alaska is sometimes described as America's socialist state, because of its collective ownership of resources—an arrangement that allows permanent residents to collect a dividend on the state's oil royalties. It has been Palin's good fortune to govern the state at a time of record oil prices, which means record dividend checks: two thousand dollars for every Alaskan. And because high oil prices also mean staggering heating bills in such a cold place—and because it's always good politics to give money to voters—Palin got the legislature this year to send an extra twelve hundred dollars to every Alaskan man, woman, and child.

But, even as Palin enjoyed populist acclaim for her grand gestures—sharing the wealth and standing up to Big Oil—it was far from certain that the natural-gas pipeline, which she claimed as her proudest accomplishment, would ever get built. Palin had committed the state to risking half a billion dollars to help move the project forward, but there was no commitment from the producers to ship their gas through the line; without that, no one was willing to finance its construction. As Palin boasted of putting the big boys in their place, it looked increasingly likely that she would have to plead with them to return. In the meantime, Palin the reformer had been caught up in her own scandal, known as Troopergate.


SWM 40'S SEEKS SWF
TO SHARE COMPANIONSHIP
MUST HAVE RESCUE HELICOPTER
BOTTLED WATER - ONLY SERIOUS APPLY

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The allegation was that Palin had dismissed her public-safety commissioner, a respected and well-liked officer named Walter Monegan, because Monegan had resisted pressure from her office to fire a state trooper named Michael Wooten. Wooten was Palin's ex-brother-in-law, and his divorce from Palin's sister Molly had involved an ugly custody battle that was not entirely resolved; it appeared that Palin had used her public office to settle a private family score. On July 28th, a bipartisan vote in the state legislature commissioned an investigation into the matter, at a cost of up to a hundred thousand dollars. Palin had invited it. "Hold me accountable," she said. She promised full coöperation: "We would never prohibit, or be less than enthusiastic about, any kind of investigation. Let's deal in the facts."

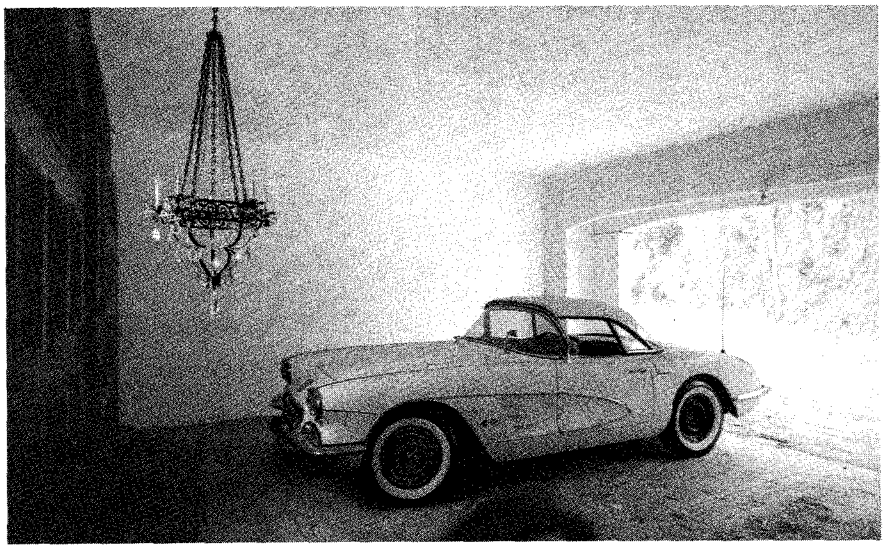
On the day I stopped by Palin's office in Juneau, she did not seem bothered that Alaska's newspapers were filled with stories about Troopergate. Palin had just called a press conference to discuss the latest twist—a tape-recorded phone call from Frank Bailey, one of her closest aides, who could be heard trying to influence an officer to sack Trooper Wooten. "Todd and Sarah are scratching their heads, you know," Bailey said, referring to the Governor and her husband, Todd Palin. "Why on earth hasn't—why is this guy still representing the department? He's a horrible recruiting tool. And, from their perspective, everybody's protecting him." Bailey, Palin's director of boards and commissions, went on to convey the Governor's displeasure, and urged action against Wooten. "She really likes Walt a lot," Bailey said on the tape, referring to Monegan. "But on this issue she feels like it's—she doesn't know why there's absolutely no action for a year on this issue. It's very troubling to her and the family. I can definitely relay that." At her press conference, Palin said she realized that the recording could be regarded as a "smoking gun." She claimed that she had never asked Bailey or anyone else to make such calls on her behalf. "However," she said, "the serial nature of the contacts understandably could be per-

POEMS BY BOB DYLAN

In the early nineteen-sixties, the photographer Barry Feinstein asked his friend Bob Dylan to write some text to accompany a series of pictures of Hollywood. The result of their collaboration, rejected by a publisher at the time, will appear in November.

17

after crashin the sportscar
into the chandelier
i ran out t the phone booth
made a call t my wife. she wasnt home.
i panicked. i called up my best friend
but the line was busy
then i went t a party but couldnt find a chair
somebody wiped their feet on me
so i decided t leave
i felt awful. my mouth was puckered.
arms were stickin thru my neck
my stomach was stuffed an bloated
dogs licked my face
people stared at me an said
"what's wrong with you?"
passin two successful friends of mine
i stopped t talk.
they knew i was feelin bad
an gave me some pills
i went home an began writin
a suicide note
it was then that i saw
that crowd comin down
the street
i really have nothing
against
marlon brando



21

death silenced her pool
the day she died
hovered over
her little toy dogs
but left no trace
of itself
at her
funeral

BARRY FEINSTEIN

ceived as some kind of pressure, presumably at my direction."

Palin, who studied journalism in college and worked for a time as a sportscaster, has an informal manner of speech, simultaneously chatty and urgent, and she reinforces her words with winks and nods and wrinklings of her nose that seem meant to telegraph intimacy and ease. Speaking recently at her former church, the Wasilla Assembly of God, she said, "It was so cool growing up in this church and getting saved here, getting baptized by Pastor Riley in Little Beaver Lake Camp, freezing-cold summer days that we had at camp—my whole family getting baptized when we were little." She sounded the same when we met, high-spirited, irrepressible, and not in the least self-conscious. On the contrary, she is supremely self-confident, in the way of someone who believes that there is nothing she can't talk her way into, or out of, or around or through. There was never a hesitation before speaking, or between phrases, no time for thought or reflection. The words kept coming—engaging, lulling, distracting—a commanding flow, but without weight. Yet, for all the cozy colloquialism, she cannot be called relaxed. She's on—full on.

She said that one of her goals had been to combat alcohol abuse in rural Alaska, and she blamed Commissioner Monegan for failing to address the problem. That, she said, was a big reason that she'd let him go—only, by her account, she didn't fire him, exactly. Rather, she asked him to drop everything else and single-mindedly take on the state's drinking problem, as the director of the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board. "It was a job that was open, commensurate in salary pretty much—ten thousand dollars less"—but, she added, Monegan hadn't wanted the job, so he left state service; he quit.

As for Frank Bailey's phone call, Palin professed not to understand what it had to do with anything. "We just found out about it a couple of days ago," she said. "And yeah, it's very disturbing, and it's an issue, and"—she began to speak as if Bailey were in the room and she were having it out with him: "You blundered, Bailey, and you know you did." She said, "I'll be talking to him," and the next week she put Bailey on paid leave and ordered him to coöperate with the investigation. But that did not explain Bailey's phone call. After all, Palin told me, "my husband made a call also. But, you know, there were death threats against a member of my family." She said, "About my husband, his First Amendment rights, even—was that taken away once his spouse was elected governor?"

Palin continued, "Our security detail, when I first got elected, met with us and said, 'Do you guys got any issues with any threats?'" To which Palin replied, "'Yeah, well, by the way, there happens to be—the only threat that I knew of was one of your own troopers.' And they're, like, 'Geez, this doesn't sound good, you need to go tell your commissioner that.' So I did. I shared that with the commissioner. So did Todd, and then Todd followed up to say"—at this point, Palin seemed to be quoting her husband: "'We were interviewed back in '05 before Sarah was even a candidate—what ever happened to that investigation, that interview? We know that the trooper' "—Wooten—" 'got to see the interview notes; well, we never have, and that's kind of a scary position for us to be in. We complied with your request to bring you information on this trooper forward, and did we put our family in jeopardy by letting him see the interview notes about the illegal activities?'"

Palin insisted that Wooten "did have illegal activities. We witnessed them, and people have come to us with complaints. He Tasered his eleven-year-old stepson. This trooper, he was pulled over for drinking and driving and a witnessed open container in his car, and he did threaten to kill my dad—I heard him—and illegally shot a moose, which is a big darned deal here in Alaska."

Trooper Wooten has admitted to Tasering the boy and shooting the moose, and he was disciplined for these things within the department, but, under the union contract, he could not be fired at the Governor's whim. (He had been cleared of the threat to Palin's father, but disciplined for drinking and driving, which he still denies.) It was obvious that this continued to frustrate Palin. She also seemed to forget that you should not talk about your affairs when they're under investigation. Troopergate was the one subject about which she seemed keen to explicate the details. She wanted to persuade me that firing Walt Monegan had nothing to do with Trooper Wooten; that it was in no way a conflict of interest or an abuse of power. But, as she spoke, she seemed to be saying something else—that her vendetta against Wooten was wholly justified.

Compared with Ted Stevens's impending criminal trial, the Troopergate investigation seemed like a sideshow—an added dash of intrigue in Alaska's sensational political summer—except for the fact that Palin had always liked to present herself as a new kind of Alaskan politician, the kind who cleaned up after others' shenanigans, not the kind who needed to be cleaned up after.

Palin's record as the mayor of Wasilla, a town forty miles north of Anchorage, told a somewhat different story. According to "Sarah," a biography by Kaylene Johnson, Palin had got into politics after she befriended the man who was then mayor and his police chief at a step-aerobics class. She made them her allies and ran for City Council. Then she challenged them for control of City Hall, and drove them out. As she purged her former friends and patrons, she denounced them as "good ol' boys," although her takeover of Wasilla had been aided from the start by Alaska's Republican Party establishment.

Palin's style of governing was unorthodox and at times impulsive. Although she boasts of a record as a fiscal conservative, she raised the sales tax while she was in office. She left the town saddled with millions of dollars in debt from the building of a new sports complex, and with legal fees, because she had failed to secure title to the land on which the complex was built. Casting herself in the Ted Stevens mold, however, she had proved herself skilled at collecting federal earmarks for Wasilla, bringing in twenty-seven million dollars for her small town in three years.

Palin's biggest difference with Alaska's Republican establishment, then, was not so much fiscal as it was social. Ted Stevens is one of the last of the Rockefeller Republicans—the real thing, as he supported Nelson Rockefeller over Barry Goldwater in the 1964 Presidential race. He is essentially secular and skeptical of government, and favors abortion rights—a common profile in Alaska, a state that

BAR
WE HAVE PRIVATE ROOMS SO YOU CAN SIT BY YOURSELF
P.C. VEY

attracts a strong streak of libertarians and rugged individualists. By contrast, Palin belongs to the state's small evangelical community, which is centered in the Mat-Su Valley, around Wasilla. She thinks that creationism should be taught in the public schools alongside Darwinian evolution, she was called the town's "first Christian mayor" by a local TV station, and she asked the town librarian about banning books, but did not follow through.

As governor, Palin has done nothing to impose her religious or social views. Alaska has no death penalty, and during the campaign she said that she would support one, but never made an issue of it; she opposed abortion even for pregnancies caused by rape, but this was a personal opinion, not a legislative cause. In fact, she refused requests to put abortion bills on the agenda during a special legislative session this summer, preferring to discuss the natural-gas pipeline, which she pursued in such a bipartisan manner that she ultimately won more solid support for it from Democrats than from Republicans. While Republicans hold most of the state's top political posts, only twenty-five per cent of Alaskan voters are registered Republicans. Fifteen per cent are Democrats, and three per cent belong to the Alaska Independence Party—the extremist states' rights, quasi-secessionist faction to which Todd Palin once pledged his allegiance. A solid majority of Alaska's electorate claims no party affiliation. Alaskans kept telling me that Alaskans vote for the person, not the party.

So it was startling to see Palin emerge in the last days of August as an icon of the evangelical base of the Republican Party, and as a fierce—often vituperative—partisan scourge, mocking Barack Obama's character and positions. It was startling, too, to hear her, in her début speech to the Republican National Convention, reading a script that consistently distorted her own record. She said that she had put her predecessor's jet for sale on eBay, which was true, except that this is how government property was often disposed of in Alaska, and the plane didn't sell online; it had to be unloaded through a private deal, at a loss of half a million dollars.

Palin also said that she told Congress "thanks but no thanks" for the notorious Bridge to Nowhere—a Ted Stevens and Don Young earmark project that had long been a target of John McCain's ridicule. (The bridge, which would have cost nearly four hundred million dollars, was intended to provide access from one island to an airport on a smaller island, with a population of fifty people.) In reality, Palin had supported the bridge in her gubernatorial race, even after Congress revoked the earmark, but abandoned it following the election and directed the money Alaska had received to other projects.

And, of course, Palin touted her gas-pipeline project. "I fought to bring about the largest private-sector infrastructure project in North American history," she said. "And, when that deal was struck, we began a nearly forty-billion-dollar natural-gas pipeline to help lead America to energy independence." That was not entirely accurate. She was still waiting for the state legislature to release the five hundred million dollars she'd promised the pipeline company to help pay for administrative costs. But the crowd loved it. Many of the delegates wore lapel buttons that said, "Coldest State, Hottest Governor."

That same week, Rick Davis, McCain's campaign manager, announced, "This election is not about issues." What mattered, he said, was the "composite view" that voters would form of the candidates. On a talk show, the Washington bureau chief of *Time* told Nicole Wallace, a McCain spokesperson, that it was still unclear whether Palin was ready "to answer tough questions about domestic policy, foreign policy." Wallace laughed. "Like from who? From you?" And she asked, "Who cares if she can talk to *Time* magazine?"

Attacking the press is nothing new in the playbook of political defense, but it took a bold twist when the McCain campaign contrived to transform a family problem—the pregnancy of Palin's unmarried seventeen-year-old daughter, Bristol—into a vindication of Palin's Christian family values. Surely, it had not been part of McCain's plan for his untested Vice-Presidential pick to start Day Four of her rollout by announcing Bristol's plans to marry the baby's father, Levi Johnston, who, as the *Times* reported, recently dropped out of high school. The campaign said that it was going public in order to quash offensive rumors that were circulating on the Internet: that Sarah Palin's five-month-old baby, Trig, who has Down syndrome, was not really hers but Bristol's, and that the Governor had faked her pregnancy in order to cover for her unwed daughter. This Faulknerian story had been making the rounds in Alaska for months—I heard versions of it in Anchorage and Juneau within twenty-four hours of arriving in each city—and it derived from the peculiar circumstances surrounding Trig's birth.

Sarah Palin had not announced her pregnancy until she was seven months along. A month later, she was in Texas to address a conference when her water broke. She decided to give the speech and then return to Wasilla to deliver the child. By way of explaining this all-day odyssey (most obstetricians advise against air travel in the eighth month, never mind during labor, and most airlines forbid it), Todd Palin later remarked, "You can't have a fish picker"—a commercial fisherman—"from Texas."

The Palin family's press release, congratulating Bristol and welcoming their prospective son-in-law to the family, was a way for the McCain campaign to suggest that the gutter press had so violated this family's privacy with its calumnies that it was necessary to violate the girl's privacy to set the record straight. By castigating the press, the campaign was able to broadcast the family melodrama in a self-righteous manner. Even better, the story of the troubled teens of Wasilla, Alaska, managed to change the subject from a debate about John McCain's seemingly impulsive abandonment of what had been the premise of his campaign: experience and national security.

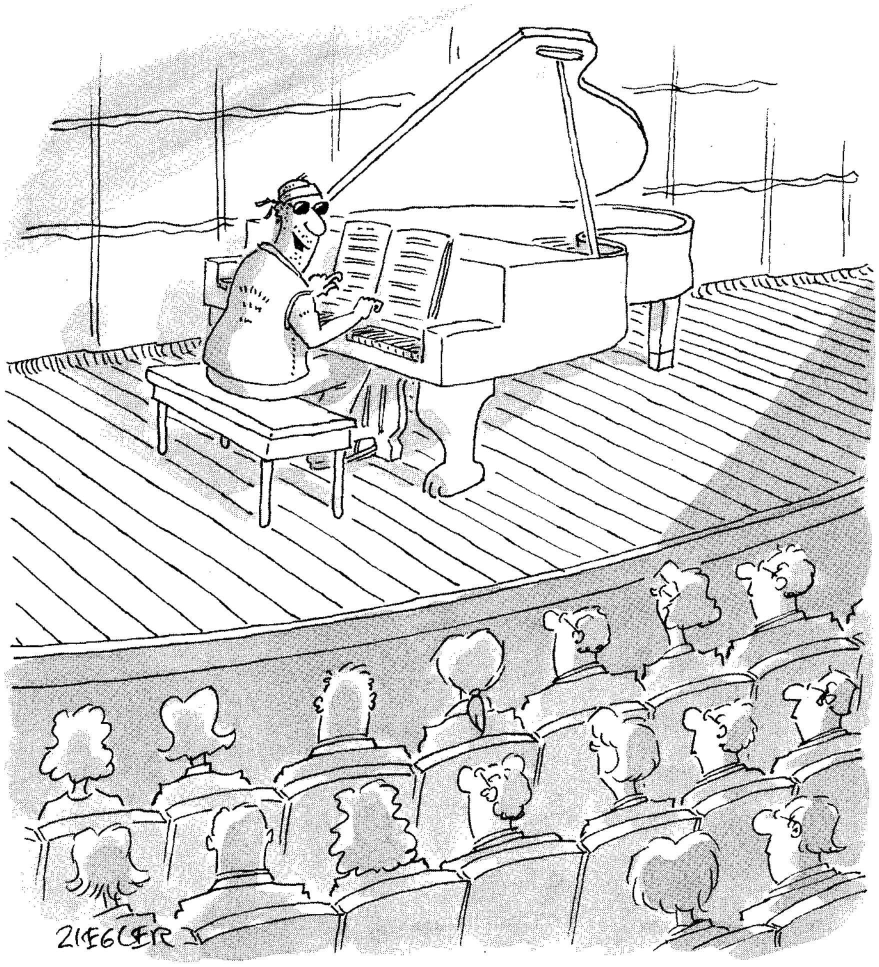
Sarah Palin's makeover was just beginning, but the campaign had scored a critical victory: the press, in asking about the least-known potential President in recent memory, had been made to look contemptible. When, at last, Palin appeared at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, most of the forty million Americans who watched her on TV were seeing her for the first time.

The control of Palin by the McCain campaign was one of many ways in which it transformed her into someone largely unrecognizable to people who knew her in Alaska, where she hadn't shown a great interest in national economic issues other than energy policy, or in international affairs, and where she was viewed as more often seeking the attention of the press than avoiding it. For her first two weeks on the Presidential ticket, Palin was kept cocooned by handlers, except at rallies, where she read an adumbrated version of her Convention speech over and over, even as many of its claims were being debunked. When a Fox News anchor demanded to know when she could be interviewed, Rick Davis explained that he would allow access only to reporters who showed "deference."

A few weeks earlier, when I telephoned Palin's office in Juneau and asked for a press officer, I was invited to meet the Governor the next day. The state legislature was in recess at the time, and I found Palin sitting sidesaddle on her receptionist's desk, studying the receptionist's family photographs. She wore slacks and a belted sweater-jacket, and her hair was piled and pinned atop her head in her trademark upsweep. She kept up the family chitchat as she led me to her office. Her press person had told me that I could have twenty minutes of the Governor's time, but, once we were alone, she was in no hurry. We talked for about an hour before an aide poked her head in to announce that someone else was waiting.

Palin wanted to be seen as someone eager to change things fast. "I'm halfway through my term," she said. "Maybe you saw the clock as you walk in. It tells me how many days we have to make a difference. I've got, like, eight hundred and forty-three days to make a difference left? Halfway through!"

As a public speaker, Palin was known for expressing goals and voicing good intentions with gusto, if with few specifics. As she talked about her hopes for Alaska, she often seemed to skip from slogan to slogan without ever touching solid ground. I mentioned at one point that I had met several Alaskans who described the state's relationship to Washington as that of a colony—rich in resources, governed from afar, and dependent on that



"Who's up for some kick-ass Bobby Short?"

distant power to sustain it—and I asked how the state could survive without the sort of federal appropriations that Ted Stevens had fought for relentlessly and that John McCain has made a cause of denouncing.

"I see us as the most unique state in the union," Palin replied. "I sure wish that we could be recognized as the head and not the tail of the U.S., because we should be the head—literally and figuratively." She continued, "Alaska could lead with the energy policy, we should be the head. So I don't see us as a colony but just extremely unique, and I say Alaskans, too, we have such a love, a respect for our environment, for our lands, for our wildlife, for our clean water and our clean air. We know what we've got up here and we want to protect that, so we're gonna make sure that our developments up here do not adversely affect that environment at all. I don't want development if there's going to be that threat to harming our environment."

She paused for a moment and said that her administration had filed a friend-of-the-court brief in an ongoing lawsuit related to the Exxon Valdez oil spill, in 1989. "We're putting our money where our mouth is to prove that we're committed to the safe, responsible, environmentally friendly developments that must take place," she said. "Otherwise, we're never gonna convince Congress and the rest of the nation, especially people on the East Coast, who seem to make a lot of decisions for us—we'll never convince them that we are willing and able to develop to get in that position of being producers and contributors for the rest of the U.S. So we have to prove that. That answers the colonist type of question."

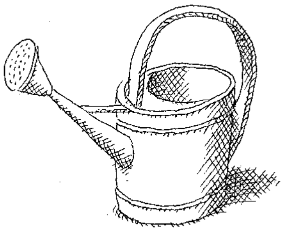
Palin likes to talk about the environment, but her view on drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is the opposite of the one held by Congress and by McCain, who said, early in his campaign, "As far as ANWR is concerned, I don't want to drill in the Grand Canyon, and I don't want to drill in the Everglades. This is one of the most pristine and beautiful parts of the world." Palin suggested that McCain might change his mind on the issue, as he has on the subject of offshore drilling. When it came to offshore drilling, she said, "McCain now is evolved."

At one point, she said, "We love our polar bears." She had just got through explaining why she opposed a ban on aerial wolf shooting. In the past decade or so, Alaska's voters have twice rejected this practice—the chasing and gunning down of wolves from small planes—and on both occasions the state reauthorized it. Now the anti-wolf-shooting crowd had forced a third referendum on the issue, and Palin, who kept a pair of wolf pelts hanging on her office wall, behind a cradle swing for Trig, was keen to see the initiative fail.

"It's not aerial hunting," she claimed. "What the state has been engaged in for the past four to six years—and I support—is predator control." Shoot the wolves, she said, and moose and caribou herds will increase, providing more food for Alaskans. That was the argument: "Let the people who live off those herds not buy and import meat." In Alaska, a state that is equivalent in size to a fifth of the continental United States and doesn't have much agriculture, such self-reliance—hunting or fishing to feed yourself and your family—is known as subsistence, and subsistence is widely held by Alaskans to be a fundamental right. "It's an emotional issue," Palin said.

Polar bears were more of a pocketbook issue. Even as she professed her affection for them, Palin had, in early August, filed suit against Dirk Kempthorne, the United States Secretary of the Interior, seeking to reverse his decision to list the polar bear as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The animals were on the list because scientists—working for the federal government—had found that the effects of global warming on arctic ice made it possible that polar bears would become endangered in the foreseeable future. Palin takes a wary view of such science. She has doubts that global warming is caused by human activity. She called the dire polar-bear population projections "just not credible."

The Interior Department had already allowed for oil and gas exploration in the polar bears' habitat, but Palin saw the listing of the polar bear as an intolerable precedent. "Then where do we go?" she asked. "It'll be another species and then another. Next it's a seal, or next it's a bird, or it's a fish, and the next thing you know that would certainly lock up Alaska's ability to live by its statehood pact to develop its resources and contribute to the rest of the United States."



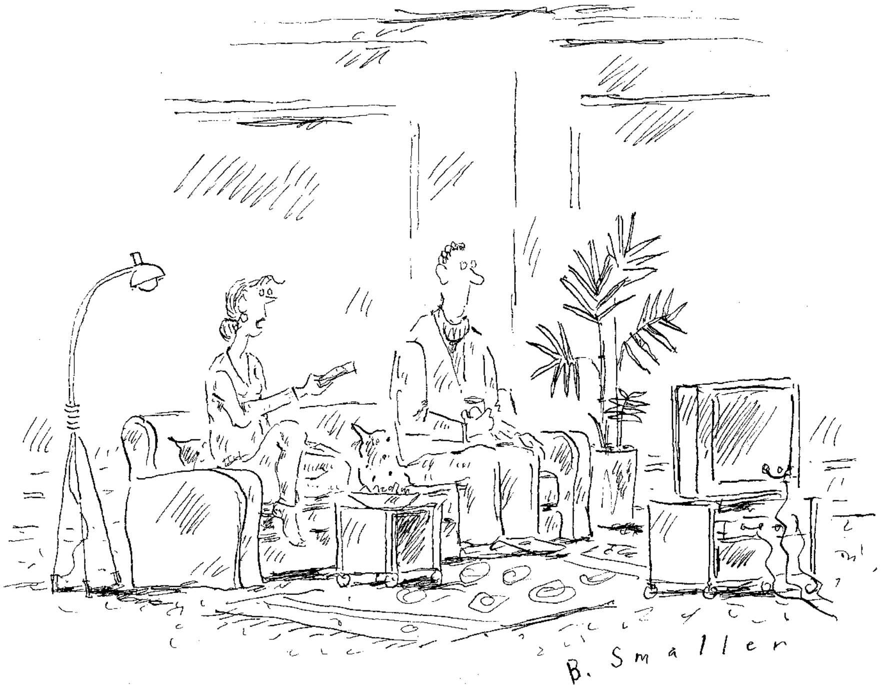
In her inaugural address as governor, Palin pledged to put "Alaska first"—and now she is running in a Presidential campaign whose slogan is "Country first." For a governor from another state, this might be an easy rhetorical adjustment, but Alaska is more like another country—and its most popular politicians, shady as some might otherwise be, are like patriots, Alaska patriots, who navigate the choppy narrows between the fear that the federal government will restrict Alaskans' freedom and the fear that the federal government will cut them loose.

Ralph Seekins, a former state senator who runs the Ford dealership in Fairbanks and serves on the Republican National Committee, told me, "There's a natural suspicion among most Alaskans of the federal government, and the leader of the resistance against that federal government is Ted Stevens." It was a curious description of a man who had done more than any other to wring from the federal budget the funds to make Alaska thrive and grow toward self-sufficiency. But it made sense. Confronted with the choice between subsistence and subsidy, the Alaska patriot has traditionally favored the pragmatic compromise: subsidized subsistence.

Sarah Palin seemed to understand this. Earlier this year, she wrote in a newspaper column, "The federal budget, in its various manifestations, is incredibly important to us, and congressional earmarks are one aspect of this relationship." And, for all her talk of Alaska fending for itself, she told me, "There isn't a need to aspire to live without any earmarks. The writing on the wall, though, is that times are changing. Presidential candidates have promised earmark reform, so we gotta deal with it, we gotta live with it, understanding that our senior senator, especially—he's eighty-four years old, he is not gonna be able to serve in the Senate forever. We will not have that seniority back there anymore." Suddenly she called out, "Alaskans, wake up!" Then she went on, "That means we have got to get ourselves in a position of seizing opportunities to develop and pay our own bills. 'Cause we're not gonna see that largesse coming to our state as we had in all these years. Whether we like that or not or support that or not, that's reality."

By speaking only of Stevens's age, Palin had skated around the possibility that his legal troubles might end his career in the Senate. She had not hesitated to call for state legislators to resign when they were indicted for corruption, and she had said that it was time for Don Young to go, even though he has not been indicted. But with Stevens she was uncharacteristically cautious. She said, "I feel like I would be kind of stepping out of bounds, being extremely and prematurely judgmental of Senator Stevens when I don't know as much as I do know about our state lawmakers who, yes, once they were indicted, I said, 'You guys gotta step aside.'"

Stevens has long been a favorite target of John McCain's anti-pork campaign, so it must have been strange for McCain to see Stevens get a sizable boost in his prospects for reëlection after Palin joined the Presidential ticket. But that may not matter. Stevens is due to go to trial in Washington, D.C., between now and Election Day, and, if the case against him remains strong, he is not likely to return to the Senate in January. If Stevens loses, it will be as an Alaska patriot to the end, whereas if Sarah Palin finds herself on the winning ticket it will require her to have shifted her loyalty away from Alaska first.



"How do you want your news—preaching to the choir or love-to-hate?"

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One day, I flew due west from Anchorage to the town of Bethel, on the flat, drab sprawl of waterlogged tundra that reaches between the deltas of the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers to the shore of the Bering Sea. Bethel, a town of some six thousand souls, is the mercantile and administrative hub for fifty-six Alaska Native villages staggered through the surrounding bush. There are no roads to Bethel; it can be reached only by sea and air, and the prices of goods for sale there reflect the journey—nine dollars and ninety-nine cents for a gallon of milk, seven dollars or more for a gallon of gasoline. When the economy is weak in Bethel, as it has been of late, the population drops—some people move to Anchorage or Fairbanks and others head upriver to their ancestral villages to live on fish and game and berries and bird eggs.

I travelled an hour by boat up the Kuskokwim to the village of Kwethluk, a collection of rough wood shacks and a couple of Russian Orthodox churches, without plumbing or running water. There I met Max Olick, the local law-enforcement officer, a huge man with a wad of snuff under his lip and a cap that read "Sheriff." "Pretty soon it's moose season," Olick said. "One moose will carry me one year. We don't have pork chops and chicken. I hate chicken. My boy is different. He prefers something more than the native foods we've been having all our life. I don't know where I went wrong with him." He said, "I told my wife we live in the Third World. She laughed. She said we have TV. I said what about water and sewer." Then he laughed. I asked him what he thought about Ted Stevens. "Long as I can remember—forty years—I've known his name," Olick said. "Forty years, I voted for him. He was doing great for Alaska." He explained, "Here in Kwethluk, there's about nine hundred and twenty people. We like Stevens because he knows what we want. What we care about is subsistence." He replenished his snuff and said, "Stevens has been a great supporter of subsistence life style, economic development. He's been in there so many years he deserves a chance to go at it one more term. But I don't think anyone can condone corruption in Washington, D.C." Olick thought about that awhile, and said, "I'm an old traditional guy that still believes in old traditional ways. But things change."

Back in Bethel, I met a dentist, a man who ran a janitorial-supplies service, and a man who ran a fuel service. I asked them how they thought Bethel and the villages it supported would fare without Ted Stevens in the Senate, in a time without earmarks. The dentist said, "We're fucked," and the janitorial-supplies man said, "There will be ghost towns." The fuel-oil man pointed to a hard black, jagged, wedge-shaped object on his desk, and asked if I knew what kind of tooth it was. "Mastodon," he said. ♦

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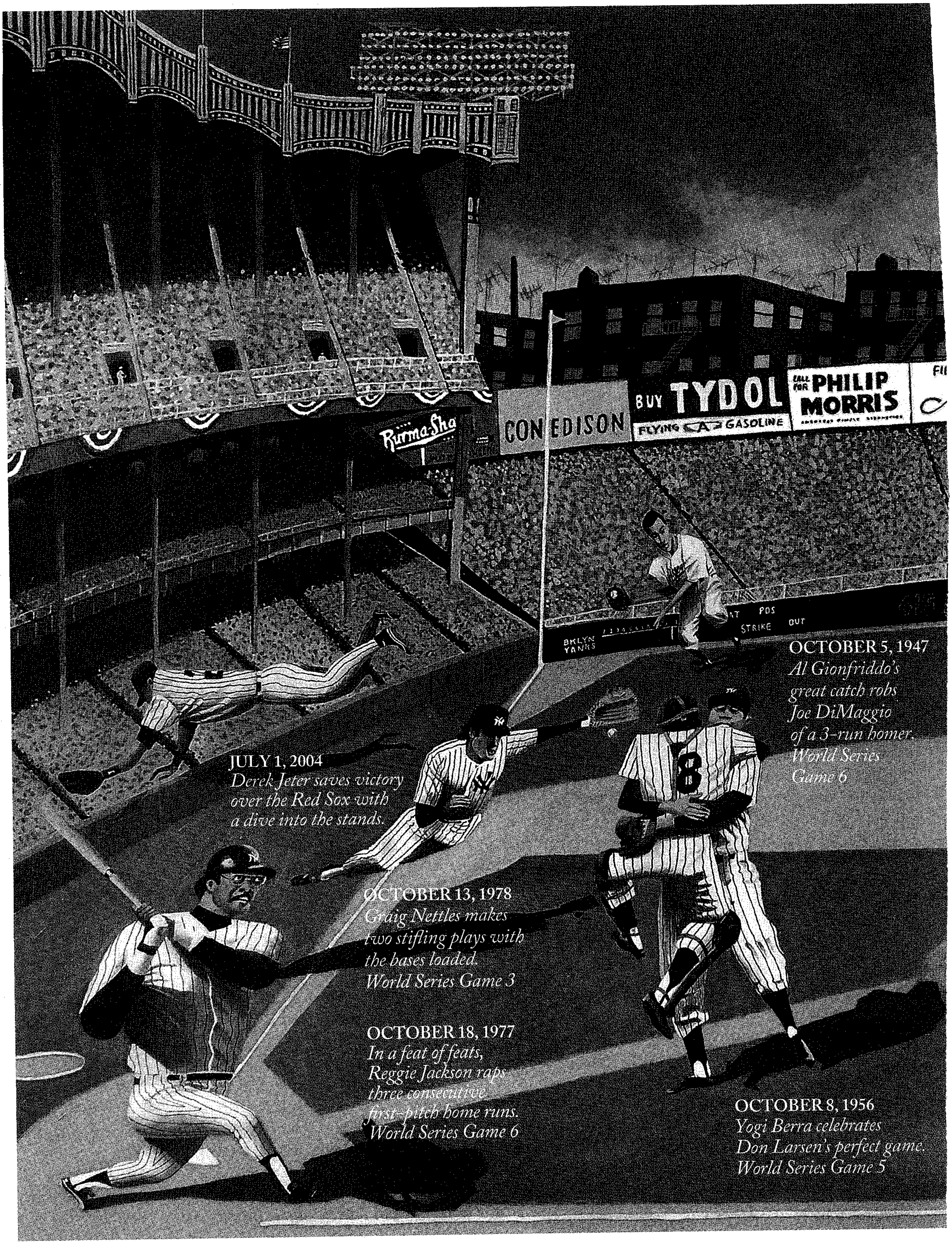
Ask the Author: Philip Gourevitch takes questions about Sarah Palin and Alaska.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CON EDISON
BUY TYDOL
FLYING A GASOLINE
CALL FOR PHILIP MORRIS
BKLYN
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OUT

JULY 1, 2004
Derek Jeter saves victory over the Red Sox with a dive into the stands.

OCTOBER 5, 1947
Al Gionfriddo's great catch robs Joe DiMaggio of a 3-run homer. World Series Game 6

OCTOBER 13, 1978
Graig Nettles makes two stifling plays with the bases loaded. World Series Game 3

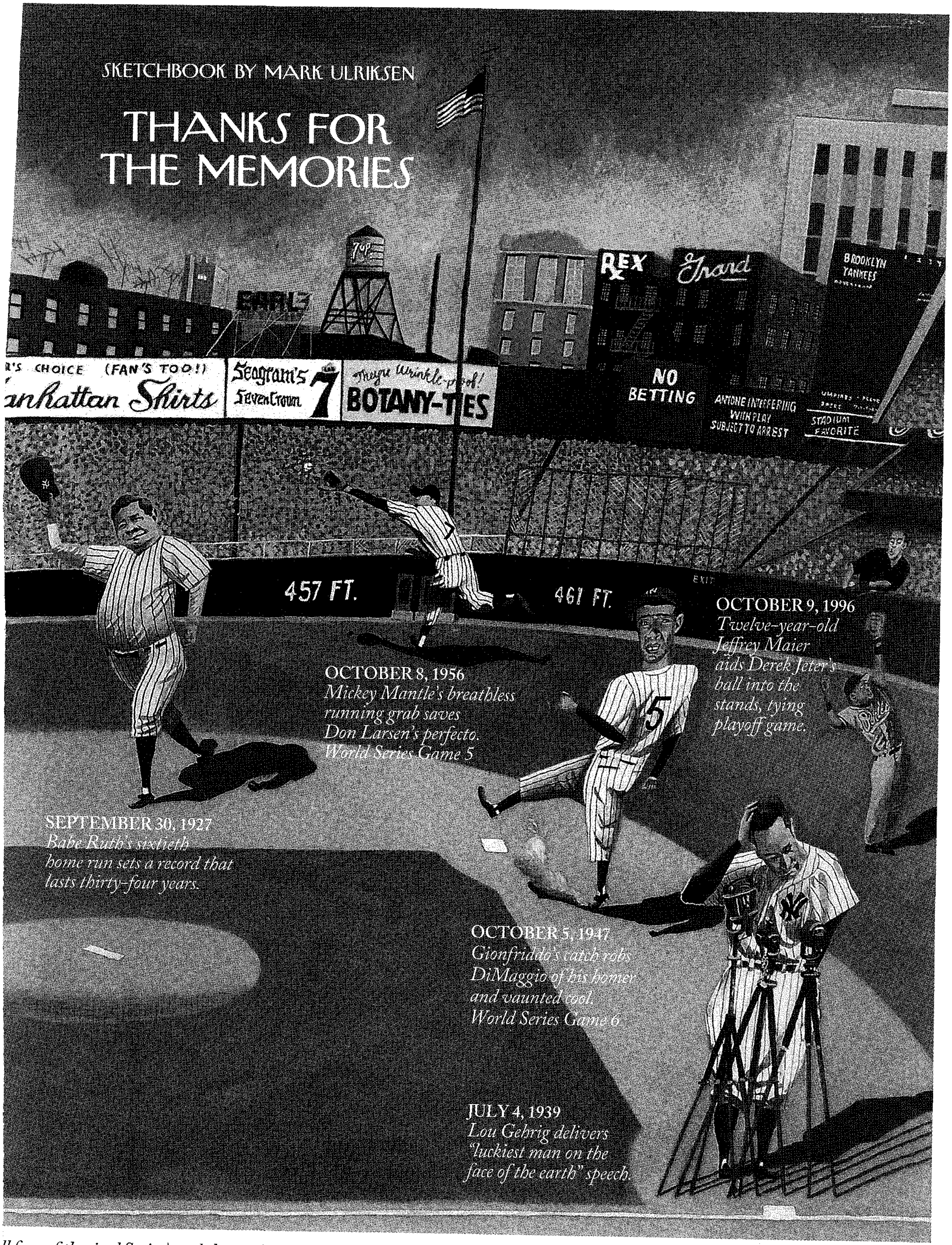
OCTOBER 18, 1977
In a feat of feats, Reggie Jackson raps three consecutive first-pitch home runs. World Series Game 6

OCTOBER 8, 1956
Yogi Berra celebrates Don Larsen's perfect game. World Series Game 5

Artist Ulriksen's Bronxian dreamscape restores the noble façades of the original Stadium, while evoking ghosts of the Dodgers (who lo

SKETCHBOOK BY MARK ULRIKSEN

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES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OCTOBER 9, 1996
Twelve-year-old Jeffrey Maier aids Derek Jeter's ball into the stands, tying playoff game.

OCTOBER 8, 1956
Mickey Mantle's breathless running grab saves Don Larsen's perfecto. World Series Game 5

SEPTEMBER 30, 1927
Babe Ruth's sixtieth home run sets a record that lasts thirty-four years.

OCTOBER 5, 1947
Gionfriddo's catch robs DiMaggio of his homer and vaunted cool. World Series Game 6

JULY 4, 1939
Lou Gehrig delivers "luckiest man on the face of the earth" speech.

l four of the cited Series) and the rumble of another triumphant homeward-bound I.R.T. train, just beyond the billboards.

FICTION

THE NOBLE TRUTHS OF SUFFERING

BY ALEKSANDAR HEMON

The uniformed *jaran* did not acknowledge that I was speaking Bosnian to him. Silently, he checked my invitation, then compared the picture in my American passport with my sullen local face and seemed to think it matched reasonably well. His head somehow resembled an armchair—with its deep-set forehead, armrest-like ears, and jutting jaw-seat—and I could not stop staring at it. He handed back my passport with the invitation tucked inside it and said, "Good evening to you."

The American Ambassador's house was a huge, ugly, new thing, built high up in the hills by a Bosnian tycoon who'd abruptly decided that he needed even more space and, without having spent a day in it, rented it to His American Excellency. There was still some work to be done: the narrow concrete path zigzagged meaninglessly through a veritable mud field; the bottom left corner of the façade was unpainted, and it looked like a recently scabbed-over wound. Farther up the hill, one could see yellow lace threading the fringes of the woods, marking a wilderness thick with mines.

Inside, however, all was asparkle. The walls were a dazzling white; the stairs squeaked with untroddenness. On the first landing, there was a stand with a large bronze eagle, its wings frozen mid-flap over a hapless, writhing snake. At the top of the stairs, in a spiffy suit a size too big, stood Jonah, the cultural attaché. I had once misaddressed him as Johnny and had been pretending it was a joke ever since. "Johnnyboy," I said. "How goes it?" He shook my hand wholeheartedly and claimed to be extremely happy to see me. Maybe he was—who am I to say?

I snatched a glass of beer and a flute of champagne from a tray-carrying mope whose Bosnianness was unquestionably indicated by a crest of hair looming over his forehead. I swallowed the beer and washed it down with champagne before entering the already crowded mingle room. I tracked down another tray holder, who, despite his mustached leathery face, looked vaguely familiar, as though he were someone who had bullied me in high school. Then, assuming a corner position, cougarlike, I monitored the gathering. There were various Bosnian TV personalities, recognizable by their Italian spectacles and their telegenic abundance of frowns and smirks. The writers at the party could be identified by the incoherence bubbling up on their stained-tie surfaces. I spotted the Minister of Culture, who resembled a mangy panda bear. Each of his fingers was individually bandaged, and he held his flute like a votive candle. A throng of Armani-clad businessmen surrounded some pretty, young interpreters, while the large head of a famous retired basketball player hovered above them, like a full moon. I spotted the Ambassador—a stout, prim Republican, with a puckered-asshole mouth—talking to a man I assumed was Macalister.

The possible Macalister was wearing a purple velvet jacket over a Hawaiian shirt. His jeans were worn and bulging mid-leg, as though he spent his days kneeling. He wore Birkenstocks with white socks. Everything on him looked hand-me-down. He was in his fifties but had a head of Bakelite-black hair that seemed as if it had been mounted on his head decades ago and had not changed shape since. Without expressing any identifiable emotion, he was listening to the Ambassador, who was rocking back and forth on his heels, pursing his lips, and slowly expelling a thought. Macalister was drinking water; his glass tilted slightly in his hand, so that the water repeatedly lapped against the brim of the glass, to the exact rhythm of the Ambassador's rocking. I had finished my second beer and champagne and was considering refuelling, when the Ambassador bellowed "May I have your attention please!" and the din died down and the crowd around the Ambassador and Macalister moved aside.

"It is my great pleasure and privilege," the Ambassador vociferated, "to welcome Dick Macalister, our great writer and—based on the little time I have spent talking to him—an even greater guy."

We all applauded obediently. Macalister was looking down at his empty glass. He moved it from hand to hand, then slipped it into his pocket.

Some weeks before, I had received an invitation from the United States Ambassador to Bosnia-Herzegovina, His Excellency Eliot Auslander, to join him in honoring Richard Macalister, a Pulitzer Prize winner and acclaimed author. The invitation had been sent to my Sarajevo address only a week or so after I had arrived. I could not figure out how the Embassy had known I was there, though I had a few elaborately paranoid ideas. It troubled me greatly that I could be located so easily, for I had come to Sarajevo for shelter. My plan was to stay at my parents' apartment for a few months and forget about the large number of things (the war on terror, my divorce, my breakdown, everything) that had been tormenting me in Chicago. My parents were already in Sarajevo for their annual spring stay, and my sister would be joining us soon. The escape to Sarajevo was beginning to feel like a depleted déjà vu of our life before we had all emigrated. We were exactly where we had been before the war, but everything was fantastically different: we were different; the neighbors were fewer and different; the hallway smell was different; and the kindergarten we used to see from our window was now a ruin that nobody had bothered to raze.

I wasn't going to go to the reception; I had had enough of America and Americans to last me another lousy lifetime. But my parents were so proud that the American Ambassador was willing to welcome me at his residence. The invitation, with its elaborate coat of arms and elegant cursive, recalled for them the golden years of my father's diplomatic service, officially elevating me into the realm of respectable adults. Father offered to let me wear his suit to the reception; it still looked good, he insisted, despite its twenty years and the triangular iron burn on its lapel.

I resisted their implorations until I went to an Internet café to read up on Richard Macalister. I had heard of him, of course, but had never read any of his books. With an emaciated teen-ager to my left liquidating scores of disposable video-game civilians and a cologne-reeking gentleman to my right listlessly browsing bestiality sites, I surfed through the life and works of Dick Macalister. To cut a long story short, he was born; he lived; he wrote books; he inflicted suffering and occasionally suffered himself. In "Fall," his most recent memoir—"a heartbreaking, clenched-jaw confession"—he owned up to wife-abusing, extended drinking binges, and spectacular breakdowns. In his novel "Depth Sickness," I read, a loan shark shoots off his own foot on a hunting trip, then redeems his vacuous, vile life in recollection, while waiting for help or death, both of which arrive at approximately the same time. I skimmed the reviews of

JEFFREY LADD, "BAČKI JARAK" (2001)

the short-story collections (one of which was called "Suchness") and spent some time reading about "Nothing We Say," "Macalister's masterpiece" and the winner of a Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The novel was about "a Vietnam vet who did everything he could to get out of the war, but cannot get the war out of himself." Everybody was crazy about it. "It is hard not to be humbled by the honest brutality of Macalister's tortured heroes," one reviewer wrote. "These men speak little not because they have nothing to say but because the last remnants of decency in their dying hearts compel them to protect others from what they *could* say."

It all sounded O.K. to me, but nothing to write home about. I found a Macalister fan site, where there was a selection of quotes from his works, accompanied by page upon page of trivial exegesis. Some of the quotes were rather nice, though, and I copied them down:

> Before Nam, Cupper was burdened with the pointless enthusiasm of youth.
>
> "The best remedy for the stormy sky is a curtain," he said.
>
> On the other side of the vast, milky windowpane sauntered a crew of basketball players, their shadows like a caravan passing along the horizon.
>
> Cupper had originally set out to save the world, but now he knew it was not worth it.
>
> One of these days the thick chitin of the world will break open and shit and sorrow will pour out and drown us all. Nothing we say can prevent that.

I liked that one. *The thick chitin of the world*—that was pretty good.

We all drank to Macalister's health and success, whereupon he was beset by a swarm of suckups. I stepped out to the balcony, where the smokers were forced to congregate. I pretended that I was looking for someone, stretching my neck, squinting, but whoever I was looking for did not seem to be there. When I went back in, Macalister was talking to a woman with long auburn hair, her fingers lasciviously curled around a champagne flute. The woman was Bosnian—you could tell by her meaty carmine lips and the cluster of tarnished silver necklaces struggling to sink into her bosom; for all I knew I might have had a hopeless crush on her in high school. She somehow managed to smile and laugh at the same time, her brilliant teeth an annotation to her laughter, her hair merrily flitting around. Macalister was burning to fuck her—I could tell from the way he leaned into her, his snout nearly touching her hair. It was jealousy, to be perfectly honest, that made me overcome my stagefright the moment the laughing woman was distracted by an Embassy flunky. As she turned away from Macalister, I wedged myself between the two of them.

"So what brings you to Sarajevo?" I asked. He was shorter than me; I could smell his hairiness, a furry, feral smell. His water glass was in his hand again, still empty.

"I go places," he said, "because there are places to go."

He had the sharp-edged nose of an ascetic. Every now and then, the muscles at the base of his jaw tightened. He kept glancing at the woman behind me, who was laughing yet again.

"I'm on a State Department tour," he added, thereby ruining the purity of his witticism. "And on assignment for a magazine."

"So how do you like Sarajevo?"

"Haven't seen much of it yet, but it reminds me of Beirut."

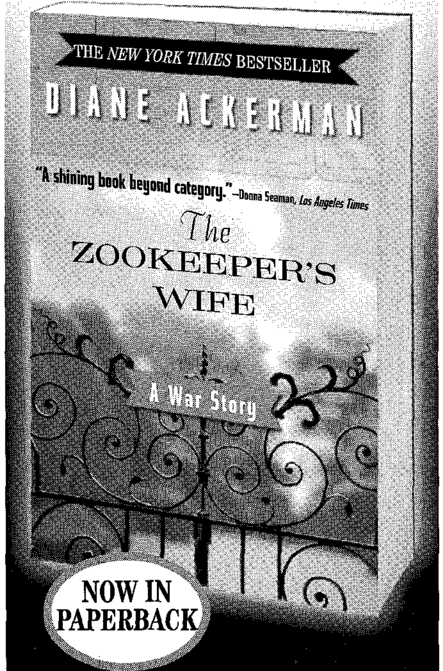
What about the Gazihusrevbegova fountain, whose water tastes like no other in the world? What about the minarets all lighting up simultaneously at sunset during Ramadan? Or the snow falling slowly, each flake descending patiently, individually, as if abseiling down some obscure silky thread? What about the morning clatter of wooden shutters in Baščaršija, when all the old stores open at the same time and the streets smell of thick-foamed coffee? The chitin of the world is still hardening here, buddy.

I get emotional when inebriated. I said none of the above, however. Instead, I said, "I've never been to Beirut."

Macalister glanced at the woman behind me, flashing a helpless smile. The woman laughed liltingly; glasses clinked; the good life was elsewhere.

"I could show you some things in Sarajevo, things no tourist would see."

"Sure," Macalister said without conviction. I introduced myself and proceeded to deliver the usual well-rehearsed story of my displacement and my writing career, nudging him toward declaring whether or not he had read my work.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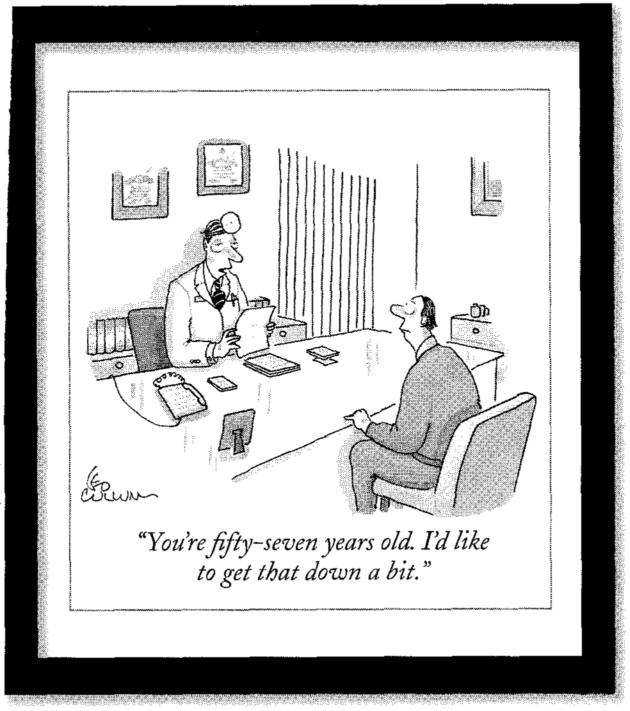

"You're fifty-seven years old. I'd like to get that down a bit."

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supposed to be funny, too.
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Macalister said. "There is
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consonants were as soft as
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Buddhist text," he said.
ul," the woman said.
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there is no sky," I said.
d work, too," Macalister

made the city look be-
ning umbrellas cascaded
downhill toward the scarce traffic flow of Titova Street.

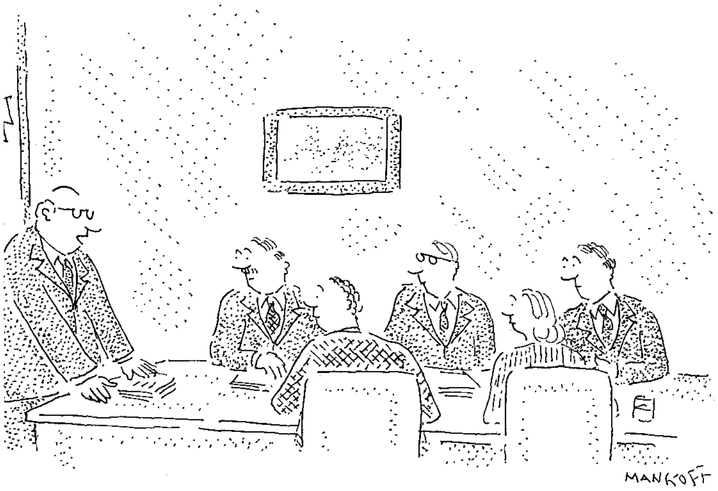
"You're O.K., Macalister," I said. "You're a good guy. You're not an asshole."

"Why, thank you," Macalister said. "I'm glad I've been vetted."

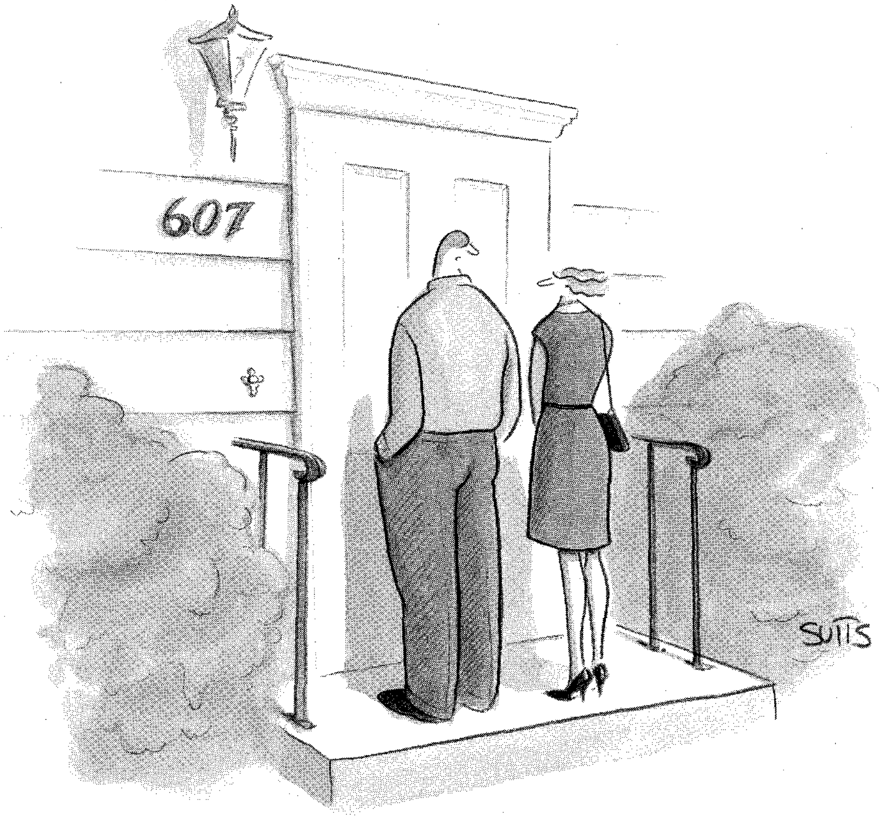
We reached the bottom of Dalmatinska and stopped. Had I not been there, Macalister might have suggested to the woman that they spend some more time together, perhaps in his hotel room, perhaps attached at the groin. But I was there, and I wasn't leaving, and there was an awkward silence as they waited for me to at least step away so that they could exchange some poignant parting words. I broke the silence and suggested that we all go out for a drink. Macalister looked straight into her eyes and said, "Yeah, let's go out for a drink," his gaze doubtless conveying that they could ditch me quickly and continue their contemplation of Buddhism and groin attachment. But the woman said no, she was tired, she had to go to work early, sorry. She shook my hand limply and gave him a hug, pressing her sizable chest against his. I did not even know her name. Macalister watched her wistfully as she hurried to catch an approaching streetcar.

"Let's have a drink," I said. "You've got nothing else to do, anyway, now that she's gone."

Honestly, I would have punched me in the face, or at least hurled some hurtful insults my way, but Macalister not only did not do this—he did not express any hostility whatsoever and agreed to come along for a drink. It



"Our goal is to develop killer apps for the new Web, but until that goal is reached we will continue to make the damned solid-waste-disposal systems on the planet."



"Do we say they have a 'lovely home' or a 'great piece of property'?"

must have been his Buddhist thing.

We headed toward Baščaršija. I pointed out to him the Eternal Flame, which was supposed to be burning for the anti-Fascist liberators of Sarajevo, but happened to be out at the moment; then, farther down Ferhadija, we stopped at the site of the 1992 breadline massacre, where there was a heap of wilted flowers; then we passed the Writers' Park, where busts of important Bosnian writers were hidden behind stalls offering pirated DVDs. We passed the cathedral, then Egipat, where they made the best ice cream in the world, then the Gazihusrevbegova mosque and the fountain. I told him about the song that said that once you drank the water from Baščaršija you would never forget Sarajevo. We drank the water; he lapped some out of the palm of his hand, the water splattering his white socks.

"I love your white socks, Macalister," I said. "When you take them off, don't throw them away. Give them to me. I'll keep them as a relic, smell them for good luck whenever I write."

"I never take them off," he said. "This is my only pair."

For a moment, I considered the possibility that he was serious, for his delivery was deadpan. He seemed to be looking out at me and the city from an interior space that no human had access to. I didn't know exactly where we were going, but he didn't complain or ask questions. I confess: I wanted him to be in awe of Sarajevo, of me, of what we meant in the world; I wanted to break through his chitin.

But I was hungry and I needed a drink or two, so instead of wandering all night we ended up in a smoky basement restaurant, whose owner, Faruk, was a war hero—there was a shoulder missile launcher hanging high up on the brick wall, and pictures of uniformed men below it. I knew Faruk pretty well, because he had once dated my sister. He greeted us, held open the rope curtain leading into the dining room, and took us to our table, beside a glass case displaying a shiny black gun and a holster.

"*Ko ti je to?*" Faruk asked as we were sitting down.

"*Pisac. Amerikanac. Dobio Pulitzera,*" I said.

"*Pulitzer je dosta jak,*" Faruk said and offered his hand to Macalister, saying, "Congratulations."

Macalister thanked him, but when Faruk walked away he noted the preponderance of weapons.

"Weapons schmeapons," I said. "The war is over. Don't worry about it."

I ordered a trainload of food—all variations on overcooked meat and fried dough—and a bottle of wine, without asking Macalister what he would like. He was a vegetarian and didn't drink, he said impassively, merely stating a fact.

"So you're a Buddhist or something?" I said. "You don't step on ants and roaches? You don't swallow midges and such?"

He smiled. I had known Macalister for only a few hours, but I already knew that he did not get angry. How can you write a book—how can you write a single Goddamned sentence—without getting angry? I wondered. How do you even wake up in the morning without getting angry? I get angry in my dreams, wake up furious. He merely shrugged at my questions. I drank more wine and then more and whatever coherence I may have regained on our walk was quickly gone. I showered him with questions. Had he served in Vietnam? How much of his fiction was autobiographical? Was Cupper his alter ego? Was it over there that he had become a Buddhist? What was it like to get a Pulitzer? Did he ever have a feeling that this was all shit, this—America, humankind, writing, everything? And what did he think of Sarajevo? Did he like it? Could he see how beautiful it had been before it became this cesspool of insignificant suffering?

Macalister talked to me, angerlessly. Occasionally, I had a hard time following him, not least because Faruk had sent over another bottle, allegedly his best wine. Macalister had been in Vietnam; he had experienced nothing ennobling there. He was not Buddhist; he was *Buddhistish*. And the Pulitzer had made him vainglorious—"vainglorious" was the word he used—and now he was a bit ashamed of it all; any serious writer ought to be humiliated and humbled by fame. When he was young, like me, he said, he had thought that all the great writers knew something he didn't. He'd thought that if he read their books he would learn something, get better. He'd thought that he would acquire what those writers had: the wisdom, the truth, the wholeness, the real shit. He had been burning to write, hungry for that knowledge. But now he knew that that hunger was vainglorious; now he knew that writers knew nothing, really—most of them were just faking it. He knew nothing. There was nothing to know, nothing on the other side. There was no walker, no path, just walking. This was it, whoever you were, wherever you were, whatever it was, and you had to make peace with that fact.

"This?" I asked. "What is this?"

"This. Everything."

"Fuck me."

He talked more and more as I sank into oblivion, slurring the few words of concession and agreement and fascination I could produce. As drunk as I was, it was clear to me that his sudden, sincere verbosity was due to his sense that our encounter was a fleeting one. He even helped me totter up the stairs as we were leaving the restaurant and flagged down a cab for me. But I would not get into it, no, sir, not before I had convinced him that I was going to read all his books, all of them, everything he had written, hack magazine jobs, blurbs, everything, and when he finally believed me I made him swear that he would come over to my place and have lunch at my home with me and my parents, because he was family now, he was an honorary Sarajevan, and I made him write down our phone number and promise that he would call, tomorrow, first thing in the morning. I would have made him promise some other things, but the street washers were approaching with their blasting hoses and the cabdriver honked impatiently and I had to go and off I went, drunk and high on having bonded with one of the greatest writers of our embarrassing, shit-ass time. By the time I got home I was sure I would never see him again.

But he called, ladies and gentlemen of the prestigious literary-prize committees, to his eternal credit he kept his promise and called the very next morning, as I was staring at the ceiling, my eyeballs bobbing on the scum of a hangover pond. It was not even ten o'clock, for Buddha's sake, yet Mother walked into my room, bent over the mattress to enter my painful field of vision, and handed me the phone without a word. When he said, "It's Dick," I frankly did not know what he was talking about. "Dick Macalister," he said. It took me a moment to remember who he was.

"So what time should I come over?" he asked.

"Come over where?"

"Come over for lunch."

Let me skip all the ums and ahs and all the words I fumbled as I struggled to reassemble my thinking apparatus, until I finally and arbitrarily selected the three-o'clock hour as our lunch time. There was no negotiation. Richard Macalister was coming to eat my mother's food. I spelled out our address for him so that he could give it to a cabbie, warned him against paying more than ten convertible marks, and told him that the building was right behind the kindergarten ruin. I hung up the phone; Dick Macalister was coming.

In my pajamas, I stood exposed to the glare of my parents' morning judgment (they did not like it when I drank) and, aided by a handful of aspirin, informed them that Richard Macalister, an august American author, the winner of a Pulitzer Prize, an abstemious vegetarian and serious candidate for full-time Buddhist, was coming over for lunch at three o'clock. After a moment of silent discombobulation, my mother reminded me that our regular lunch time was one-thirty. But when I shrugged to indicate helplessness, she sighed and went to inspect the supplies in the fridge and the icebox. Presently she started issuing deployment orders: my father was to go to the produce market with a list, right now; I was going to brush my teeth and, before coffee or breakfast, hurry to the supermarket to buy bread and kefir, or whatever it was that vegetarians drank, and, also, vacuum-cleaner bags; she was going to start preparing pie dough. By the time she was clearing off the table where she would roll out the dough, my headache and apprehension were gone. Let the American come. We were going to be ready for him.

Macalister arrived wearing the same clothes as the previous night—the velvet jacket, the Hawaiian shirt—in combination with a pair of snakeskin boots. My parents made him take them off. He did not complain or try to get out of it, even as I unsuccessfully tried to arrange a dispensation for him. "It is normal custom," Father said. "Bosnian custom." Sitting on a low shaky stool, Macalister grappled with his boots, bending his ankles to the point of fracture. Finally, he exposed a new pair of blazingly white tube socks and

"Astoundingly great."
—Time

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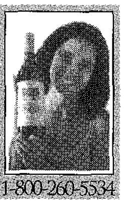

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lined up his boots against the wall, like a good soldier. Our apartment was small, Socialist size, but Father told him which way to go as though the dining room were at the far horizon and he would have to hurry to get there before night set in.

Macalister followed his directions with a benevolent smile, possibly amused by my father's histrionics. Our dining room was also a living room and a TV room, and Father seated Macalister in the chair at the dining table that faced the television set. This was the seat that had always been contentious in my family, for the person sitting there could watch television while eating, but I don't think Macalister recognized the honor bestowed upon him. CNN was on, but the sound was off. Our guest sat down and tucked his feet under the chair, curling up his toes.

"Drink?" Father said. "*Viski*? *Loza*?"

"No whiskey," Macalister said. "What is *loza*?"

"*Loza* is special drink," Father said. "Domestic."

"It's grappa," I explained.

"No, thanks. Water is just fine."

"Water. What water? Water is for animals," Father said.

"I'm an alcoholic," Macalister said. "I don't drink alcohol."

"One drink. For appetite," Father said, opening the bottle of *loza* and pouring it into a shot glass. He put the glass in front of Macalister. "It is medicine, good for you."

"I'll take that," I said and snatched it away before Macalister's benevolence evaporated. I needed it, anyway.

My mother brought in a vast platter of smoked meat and sheep cheese perfectly arrayed, toothpicks sticking out like little flagpoles. Then she returned to the kitchen to fetch another couple of plates lined with pieces of spinach and potato pie, the crust so crisp as to look positively chitinous.

"No meat," Mother said. "Vegetation."

"Vegetarian," I corrected her.

"No meat," she said.

"Thank you," Macalister said.

"You have little meat," Father said, swallowing a slice. "Not going to kill you."

Then came a basket of fragrant bread and a deep bowl brimming with mixed-vegetable salad.

"Wow," Macalister said.

"That's nowhere near the whole thing," I said. "You'll have to eat until you explode."

On the soundless TV, there were images from Baghdad. Two men were carrying a corpse with a steak-tartare-like mess instead of a face. American soldiers in bulletproof gear had their rifles pointed at a ramshackle door. A clean-shaven, suntanned general stated something that was inaudible to us. From his seat, Father glanced sideways at the screen, still chomping on the smoked meat. He turned toward Macalister, pointed a bladelike hand at his chest, and asked, "Do you like Bush?" Macalister looked at me—the same fucking bemused smile stuck on his face—to determine whether this was a joke. I shook my head: alas, it was not. I had not expected Macalister's visit to turn into such a complete disaster so quickly.

"*Tata, nemoj*," I said. "*Pusti čovjeka*."

"I think Bush is a gaping asshole," Macalister said, unfazed. "But I like America and I like democracy. People are entitled to their mistakes."

"Stupid American people," Father said and put another slice of meat in his mouth.

Macalister laughed, for the first time since I'd met him. He slanted his head to the side and let out a deep, chesty growl of a laugh. In shame, I looked around the room, as though I had never seen it. The souvenirs from our years in Africa: the fake-ebony figurines, the screechingly colorful wicker bowls, a malachite ashtray containing entangled paper clips and Mother's amber pendants. A lace handiwork whose delicate patterns were violated by prewar coffee stains. The carpet with an angular horse pattern. All these familiar things had survived the war and displacement. I had grown up in this apartment, and now it seemed old, coarse, and anguished.

Father continued his interrogation relentlessly: "You win Pulitzer Prize?"

"Yes, sir," Macalister said. I admired him for putting up with it.

"You wrote good book," Father said. "You hard worked."

Macalister smiled and looked down at his hand. He was embarrassed, perfectly devoid of vainglory. He straightened out his toes and then curled them even deeper inward.

"*Tata, nemoj*," I pleaded.

"Pulitzer Prize big prize," Father said. "You are rich?"

Abruptly, it dawned on me what he was doing—he used to interrogate my girlfriends this way, to ascertain whether they were good for me. He wanted to make sure that I was making the right decisions, that I was going in the right direction.

"No, I'm not rich. Not at all," Macalister said. "But I manage."

"Why?"

"*Tata!*"

"Why what?"

"Why you are not rich?"

Macalister gave another generous laugh, but before he could answer, Mother walked in carrying the main dish: a roasted leg of lamb and a crowd of potato halves drowning in fat.

"*Mama!*" I cried. "*Pa rek'o sam ti da je vegetarijanac.*"

"*Nemoj da vičeš. On moze krompira.*"

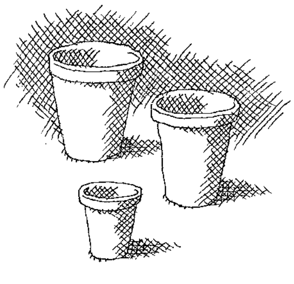
"That's O.K.," Macalister said, as though he understood. "I'll just have some potatoes."

Mother grabbed his empty plate and put four large potatoes on it, followed by a few pieces of pie and some salad and bread, until the plate was heaping with food, all of it soaked in the lamb fat that came with the potatoes. I was on the verge of tears; it seemed that insult upon insult had been launched at our guest. But Macalister did not object or try to stop her—he succumbed to us, to who we were.

"Thank you, Ma'am," he said.

I poured another shot of *loza* for myself, then went to the kitchen to get some beer. "*Dosta si pio,*" Mother said, but I ignored her.

My father cut the meat, then sloshed the thick, juicy slices in the fat before depositing them on our respective plates. Macalister politely waited for everyone to start eating, then began chipping away at the pile before him. The food on Father's plate was neatly organized into taste units: the meat and potatoes on one side, the mixed salad on the other, the pie at the top. He proceeded to exterminate it, morsel by morsel, not uttering a word, not putting down his fork and knife for a moment, only glancing up at the TV screen now and then. We ate in silence, as though the meal were a job we had to get done, thoroughly and quickly.



Macalister held his fork in his right hand, chewing slowly. I was mortified imagining what this—this meal, this apartment, this family—looked like to him, what he made of our small, crowded existence, of our unsophisticated fare designed for famished people, of the loss that flickered in everything we did or didn't do. This home was the museum of our lives, and it was no Louvre, let me tell you. I was awaiting his judgment, expecting condescension at best, contempt at worst. I was ready to hate him. But he munched his allotment slowly, uninterestedly, restoring his benevolent half smile after every bite.

He liked the coffee; he loved the banana cake. He washed down each forkful with a sip from his demitasse; he actually grunted with pleasure. "I am so full I will never eat again," he said. "You're an excellent cook, Ma'am. Thank you very much."

"It is good food, natural, no American food, no cheeseburger," Mother said.

"I will ask you question," Father said. "You must tell truth."

"Don't answer," I said. "You don't have to answer."

Macalister must have thought I was joking, for he said, "Shoot."

"My son is writer, you are writer. You are good, you win Pulitzer."

I knew exactly what was coming. "*Nemoj, Tata,*" I begged, but he was unrelenting.

"Tell me, is he good? Be objective," Father said, pronouncing "objective" as "obyective."

Mother was looking at Macalister expectantly. I poured myself another drink.

"It takes a while to become a good writer," Macalister said. "I think he's well on his way."

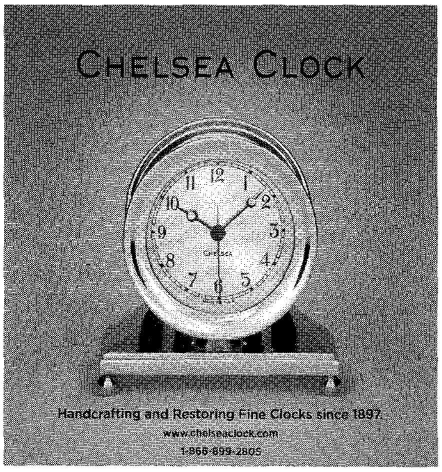
"He always like to read," Mother said.

"Everything else, lazy," Father said. "But always read books."

"When he was young man, he always wrote poesy. Sometimes I find his poems, and I cry," Mother said.

"I'm sure he was talented," Macalister said. Perhaps he had, in fact, read something I wrote. I must have been

"Extra-ordinarily vibrant."
—New York Times



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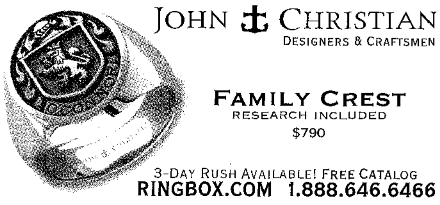

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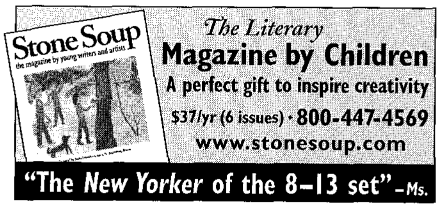

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drunk, for I was holding back tears.

"Do you have children?" Mother asked him.

"No," Macalister said. "Actually, yes. A son. He lives with his mother in Hawaii. I am not a good father."

"It is not easy," my father said. "Always worry."

"No," Macalister said. "I would never say it's easy."

Mother reached across the table for my hand, tugged it to her lips, and kissed it warmly. At which point I stood up and left the room.

He had drunk water from Baščaršija, but he had no trouble forgetting Sarajevo. Not even a postcard did he send us; once he was gone from our lives, he was gone for good. For a while, every time I talked to my father on the phone he asked me if I had spoken with my friend Macalister. Invariably, I had to explain that we never had been and never would be friends. "Americans are cold," Mother diagnosed the predicament.

I did go to see him when he came to Chicago to read at the library. I sat in the back row, far from the stage, well beyond the reach of his gaze. He wore the same Birkenstocks and white socks, but the shirt was flannel now, and there were blotches of gray in his Bakelite hair. Time does nothing but hand you down shabbier things.

He read from "Nothing We Say," a passage in which Cupper flips out in a mall, tears a public phone off the wall, then beats the security guard unconscious with the receiver, until he finds himself surrounded by police aiming guns at him:

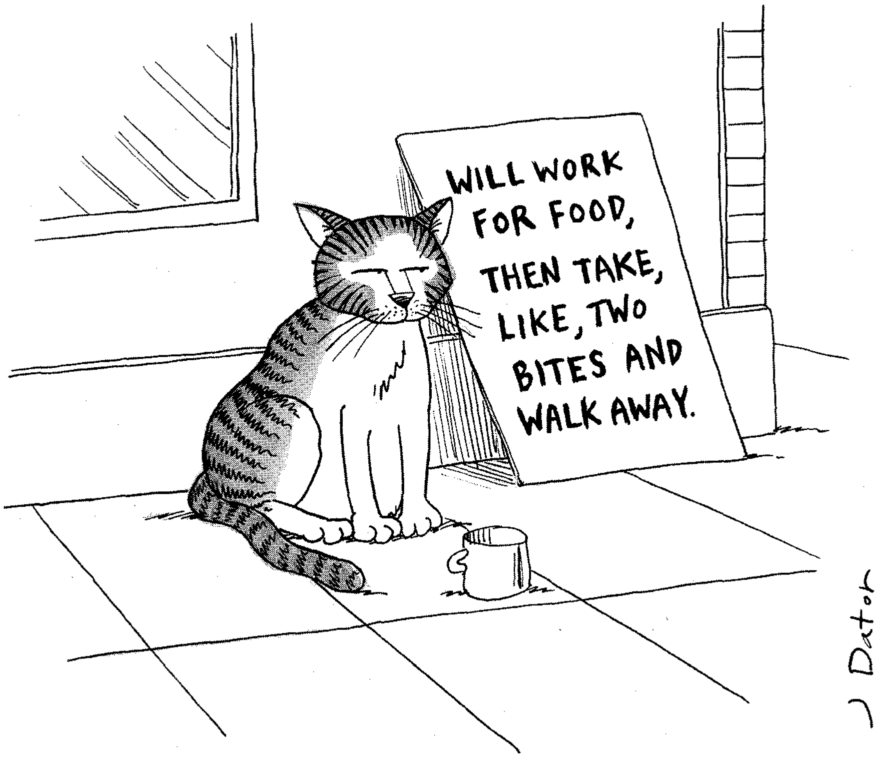
> The feral eyes beyond the cocked guns glared at Cupper. His hand was suspended midair over the security guard, the blood-washed receiver poised to break the man's face completely open. The security guard whimpered and gurgled up a couple of pink bubbles. The cops were screaming at him, but Cupper could hear nothing—they opened and closed their mouths like dying fish. He recognized that they were burning to shoot him, and it was their zeal that made him want to live. He wanted to keep bothering them with his existence. He straightened up, dropped the receiver, pressed his hands against the nape of his neck. The first kick rolled him onto his side. The second broke his ribs. The third made him groan with pleasure.

Macalister lowered his voice to make it sound hoarse and smoky; he kept lowering it as the level of violence increased. Somebody gasped; the woman next to me leaned forward and put her bejewelled hand to her mouth in a delicate gesture of horror. I didn't, of course, wait in line so that he could sign my book; I didn't have "Nothing We Say" with me. But I watched him as he looked up at his enthralled readers, pressing his book to their chests like a found child, as they leaned over the table to get closer to him. He smiled at them steadfastly, unflinchingly.

I was convinced that I had receded into worldly irrelevance for him; I had no access to the *Buddhistish* realms in which he operated with cold metaphysical disinterest. But I followed his work avidly; you could say I became dedicated. I read and reread "Nothing We Say" and all his old books; on his Web site I signed up for updates on his readings and publications; I collected magazines that published his interviews. I felt I had some intimate knowledge of him, and I was hoping to detect traces of us in his writing, something that would confirm our evanescent presence in the world, much like those subatomic phenomena whose existence is proved by the short-lived presence of hypothetical particles.

Finally, his new novel, "The Noble Truths of Suffering," came out. From the first page, I liked Tiny Walker, the typically Macalisterian main character: an ex-marine who would have been a hero in the battle of Falluja had he not been dishonorably discharged for failing to corroborate the official story of the rape of a twelve-year-old Iraqi girl and the murder of her and her entire family, *an unfortunate instance of miscommunication with local civilians.* Tiny returns home from Iraq to Chicago and spends time visiting his old haunts on the North Side, trying vainly to drink himself *into a stupor, out of turpitude.* He has nothing to say to the people he used to know; he breaks shot glasses against their foreheads. *The city barked at him and he snarled back.* High out of his mind, he has a vision of a snake invasion and torches his studio with everything he owns in it, which is not much. A flashback that turns into a nightmare suggests that he was the one who slit the girl's throat. Lamia Hassan was her name. She speaks to him in unintelligibly accented English.

He wakes up on a bus to Janesville, Wisconsin. Only upon arrival does he realize that he is there to visit the family of Sergeant Briggs, the psychopathic bastard whose idea it was to rape Lamia. He finds the house, knocks on the door, but there is nobody there, just a TV playing a children's show. Tiny stumbles into a nearby


WILL WORK FOR FOOD, THEN TAKE, LIKE, TWO BITES AND WALK AWAY.
J Dator

bar and drinks with the locals, who buy him booze as an expression of support for our men and women in uniform. He tells them that Sergeant Briggs, *a genuine American hero*, was one of his best buddies in Iraq. He also tells them about his friend Declan, who got shot by a sniper. Briggs dragged him home under fire and got his knee blown off. Tiny tells them not to trust the newspapers, or the cocksuckers who say that we are losing the war. *We are tearing new holes in the ass of the world*, he says. *We are breaking it open.*

Outside, snow is piling up. He steals a pickup truck that is parked in front of the joint and goes back to Sergeant Briggs's house. This time, he does not knock on the door. He goes around to the back, where he exposes himself—*hard and red, his dick throbbing*—to a little girl who is playing in the snow. The girl smiles and looks at him calmly, *untroubled by his presence, as though she were floating in her own aquarium.* He zips himself up and walks back to the truck, stepping gingerly into his own footprints. Now he drives farther north, to the Upper Peninsula. Declan came from Iron Mountain. Declan is dead, it turns out, but Tiny talks to him as he drives through the snowstorm. It seems that Declan lost his mind after the unfortunate incident. Briggs forced him to get on top of the girl, taunted him when he could not penetrate her. Tiny watched over him afterward, because Declan was ripe for suicide. And then he deliberately walked into an ambush. Briggs dragged home a corpse.

In the midst of a blinding blizzard, a wall ten feet tall emerges before Tiny. He brakes before he hits it. He steps out of the pickup truck and walks through the wall, like a ghost. He arrives in Iron Mountain in the middle of the night. He wakes up freezing in a parking lot. *Everywhere he looked, there was nothing but immaculate whiteness.* His clothes are soaked in blood, but he has no cuts or wounds on his body. He finds Declan's parents' house. Before he rings the bell, he notices that in the bed of his pickup there is a gigantic deer with intricate antlers, its side torn open. Tiny can see its insides, pale and thoroughly dead.

Declan's parents know who Tiny is—Declan spoke about him. They are ancient and tired, tanned with grief. They want him to stay for dinner. Declan's mother gives him Declan's old shirt, which is far too big for Tiny. Tiny changes in an upstairs room that smells sickeningly of honeysuckle Airwick. On the walls, there are faded photos of African landscapes: a herd of elephants strolling toward sunset; a small pirogue with a silhouette of a rower on a vast river.

It was only when they sat down to eat that I recognized Declan's mother and father as my parents. The old man asks incessant questions about Iraq and war, keeps pouring bourbon into Tiny's glass over the mother's objections. The mother keeps bringing in the same food—meat and potatoes and, instead of spinach and potato, apple and rhubarb pies. The father segregates the food on his plate. There was absolutely no doubt: everything bespoke my parents—the way they talked, the way they ate, the way Declan's mother grabbed Tiny's hand and kissed it, *pressing her lips into the ghost of Declan's hand.* Tiny is suddenly ravenous, and he eats and eats. He begins to tell them about *the unfortunate instance of miscommunication with local civilians*, but leaves Declan out of it. He tells them the gory details of the rape—*Lamia's moans, the flapping of her skinny arms, the blood pouring out of her*—and the old man listens to him unflinchingly, while the mother goes to the kitchen to fetch coffee. They seem untroubled, as if they're not even hearing him. For an instant, he thinks that he is not speaking at all, that this is all happening in his head, but then he realizes that there is nothing inside them, *nothing but grief.* Other people's children are of no concern to them, *for there was no horror in the world beyond Declan's eternal absence from it.* Tiny is sobbing.

"Let me ask you a question," the old man said. "You must tell me the truth."

Tiny nodded.

"My son was a soldier. You're a soldier."

Tiny knew exactly what was coming. Let it come—he was ready now.

"Tell me, was he a good man, a good soldier?" The old man lurched forward and touched Tiny's shoulder. His hand was cold. Outside, snow was slowly falling. Each flake came down patiently, abseiling down an obscure silky rope.

"It takes a while to become a good soldier," Tiny said. "Declan was good. He was a good man." ♦

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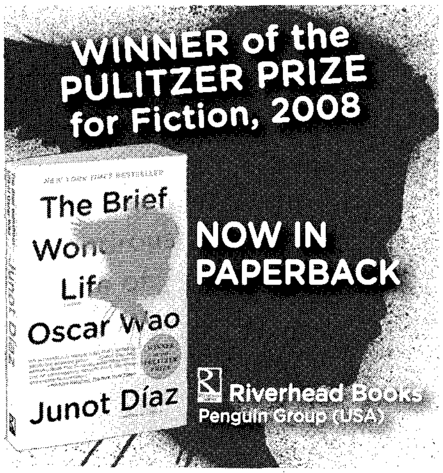
Aleksandar Hemon on the fiction podcast.



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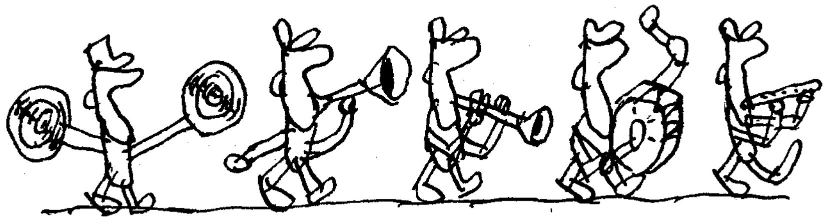


BOOKS

PRESIDENT TOM'S CABIN

Jefferson, Hemings, and a disclaimed lineage.

BY JILL LEPORE

In 1852, when Harriet Beecher Stowe finished "Uncle Tom's Cabin," she wrote to a congressman, Horace Mann, who happened to be Nathaniel Hawthorne's brother-in-law, to beg a favor. Might he know how to get a copy of her book to Charles Dickens? "Were the subject any other I should think this impertinent & Egotistical," Stowe wrote, making of demurral a poor cloak for presumption. But she had reason to expect Dickens's sympathy. A decade earlier, upon completing an unhappy tour of the United States, Dickens judged the country "the heaviest blow ever dealt at liberty." Seeing slavery at first hand left him sick. "I really don't think I could have borne it any longer," he confessed, after riding a train whose passengers included a mother and her weeping children, sold away from their father by a fiend whom Dickens satirized as yet another American "champion of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

It would be going too far to say that Charles Dickens had it in for the original champion of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Still, he rarely missed an opportunity to throw a dagger in Thomas Jefferson's general direction, slurring, in his American novel, "Martin Chuzzlewit" (1844), that "noble patriot . . . who dreamed of Freedom in a slave's embrace."

Discerning readers knew which patriot he meant. Dickens was quoting the Irish poet Thomas Moore, who visited the United States soon after a scurrilous Scots journalist named James Callender published, in the September, 1802, Richmond *Recorder*, long-standing rumors that Jefferson, who was President at the time, had fathered children by one of his slaves: "Her name is SALLY." Moore, inspired, wrote a poem—

> The weary statesman for repose hath fled
> From halls of council to his negro's shed,
> Where blest he woos some black Aspasia's grace,
> And dreams of freedom in his slave's embrace!

—onto which Dickens, appalled, tacked an epilogue: "and waking sold her offspring and his own in public markets."

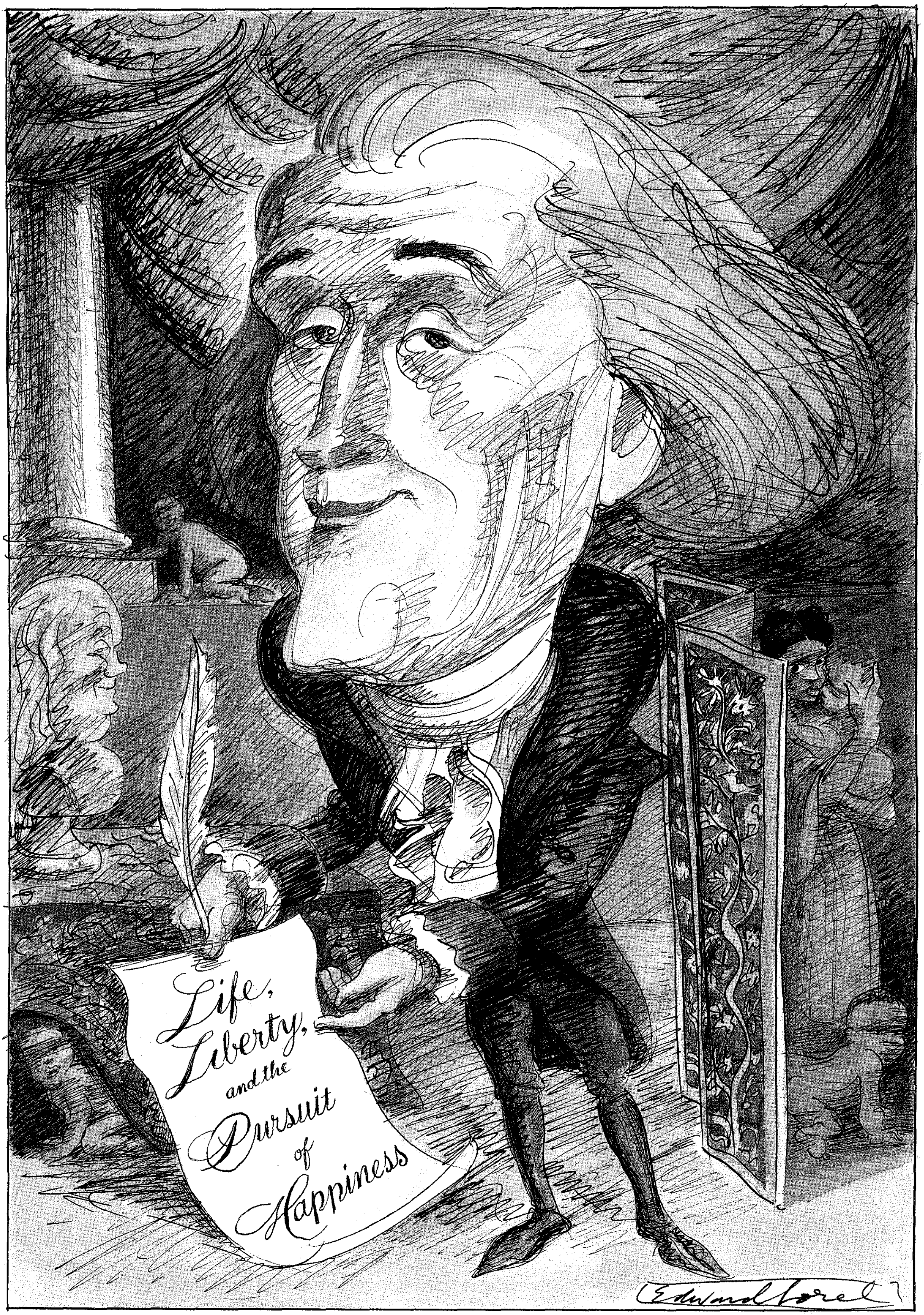
James Callender drowned himself in the James River in 1803, but even unstable scandalmongers sometimes get a story straight. Thomas Jefferson did own a woman named Sally, Sally Hemings, and her children looked just like him. Writing four decades after Callender, Dickens did no more than add a seedy detail—the sexually sated author of the Declaration of Independence pocketing a tidy sum by peddling his own progeny lends the story an Oliverian twist—but even this wasn't entirely Dickens's invention. In 1838 or 1839, the London *Morning Chronicle*, where Dickens worked as a reporter, picked up a story that had been reprinted in the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*. An eyewitness claimed to have seen one of Jefferson's children on the auction block at the most infamous slave market in America: "the DAUGHTER of THOMAS JEFFERSON SOLD in New Orleans, for ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS."

Dickens probably believed this to be true. It was not. After Jefferson's death, on July 4, 1826, his slaves were sold at auction. But that auction did not include Sally Hemings's children, as Annette Gordon-Reed records in her commanding and important book, "The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family" (Norton; $35). Jefferson freed two of Hemings's three surviving sons, Madison and Eston, in his will; the other son, Beverly, had already left Monticello. Hemings had a daughter, too, Harriet, who left Monticello in 1822, when she was twenty-one. "Harriet. Sally's run," Jefferson wrote in his "Farm Book," where he kept track of his human property, a population that needed minding, since Jefferson was one of the largest slaveholders in Virginia. Harriet didn't exactly run. "She was nearly as white as anybody, and very beautiful," recalled one of Jefferson's overseers, who also said that Jefferson ordered him to give fifty dollars to the girl, and paid for her ride, by stage, to Philadelphia. A widely circulated rumor, reported by another literary English rambler, Frances Trollope (Anthony Trollope's mother), in her 1832 "Domestic Manners of the Americans," turns out to be well-founded: "When, as it sometimes happened, his children by Quadroon slaves were white enough to escape suspicion of their origin, he did not pursue them if they attempted to escape."

But if the report that Jefferson's daughter had been pawned off to the highest bidder wasn't true, it still made a good story. At least, that's what William Wells Brown thought when he wrote "Clotel; or, The President's Daughter," the first African-American novel, published in 1853, a year after "Uncle Tom's Cabin." That year, Stowe toured England, where she met Dickens, and where Brown, who was living in London, rallying British sympathy for the American abolitionist movement, managed to get a glimpse of her. Brown knew a thing or two about what Stowe, in her Dickensian subtitle, called "Life Among the Lowly."

ABOVE: BENOÎT JACQUES; OPPOSITE: EDWARD SOREL

For Annette Gordon-Reed, the real scandal wasn't what Jefferson did; it was what historians did, in scanting the evidence for it.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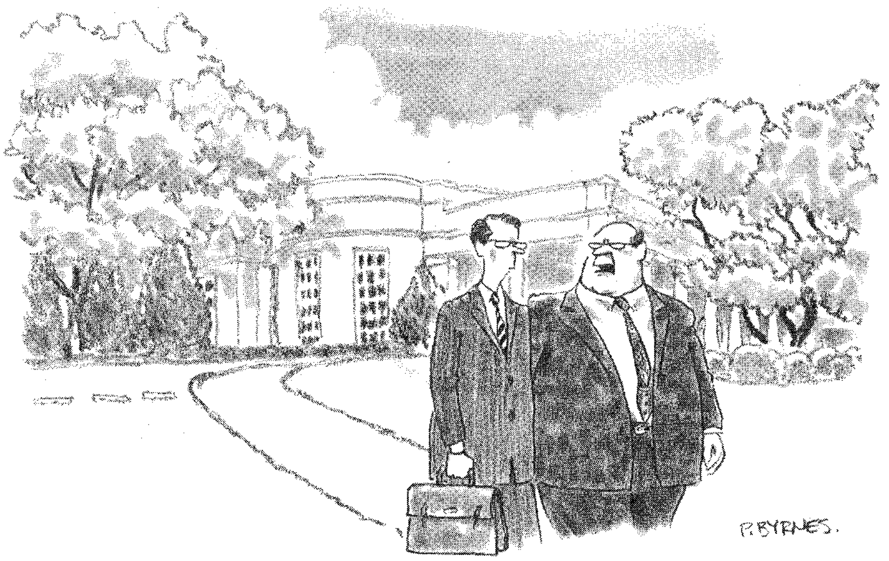


"The right hand doesn't even know what the right hand is doing."

• •

Stowe's novel opens in Kentucky; Brown was born there. He worked for a Mississippi River slave trader, dyeing the hair of gray-haired slaves black, so that they might fetch a better price. His sister was sold away. In 1833, he and his mother tried to run; they were caught. His mother was sold down the river. The following year, Brown finally escaped, alone. In 1847, two years after the celebrated abolitionist Frederick Douglass published the story of his life, Brown told his own not entirely unvarnished tale, "Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave, Written by Himself." After Stowe's novel made publishing history (it sold ten thousand copies in its first week), Brown decided to try his hand at fiction. What better plot than the shocking story that had animated the pen of Dickens himself?

Brown's characters are different from Uncle Tom, Eliza, and Topsy, but they're no less didactic, and his novel, like Stowe's, follows their desperate fates, trial heaped upon tribulation, like so many ice floes crashing into the banks of the Mississippi. Clotel makes her escape by disguising herself as a swarthy gentleman. Captured, she is imprisoned in a "negro pen" in Washington, D.C. She flees, but, crossing a bridge from Washington to Virginia—"within plain sight of the President's house"—she is once again trapped. With a last look toward Heaven, she leaps into the Potomac. "Thus died Clotel, the daughter of Thomas Jefferson," writes Brown, toward the end of a novel in which he included a chapter titled "Truth Stranger Than Fiction."

It has taken a very long time for historians to regard this story seriously, or even to begin to bother to sort out fact from fiction. Just why was the subject of Gordon-Reed's 1997 tour de force, "Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy," a book that was as much a painstaking investigation of the documentary record as a devastating brief on standards of evidence in historical research. For Gordon-Reed, a legal scholar, the real scandal wasn't what happened between Jefferson and Hemings but how willing earlier generations of Jefferson biographers had been to ignore the implications of evidence right in front of them, even documents like Jefferson's "Farm Book," but, especially, testimony about things said and done by the Hemingses themselves. Behind the Jefferson-Hemings affair, Gordon-Reed wrote, lay yet another buried family tie: Sally Hemings was the half sister of Jefferson's wife, Martha Wayles. Taking a lawyer's view of the case, Gordon-Reed pieced together the evidence and weighed it. She presented a strong case in support of the claim that Jefferson fathered Hemings's children, and freed them, or let them go when they reached the age of twenty-one, because Hemings had extracted from him, in 1789, at the beginning of their decades-long affair, a promise that he would do exactly that.

Gordon-Reed's "Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings" was published the same year as Joseph Ellis's stirring and elegiac biography "American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson," in which Ellis asserted—intuited, actually, since there is no evidence for this—that Jefferson, who had got his wife pregnant six times in ten years, had never slept with the very beautiful Sally Hemings (who reportedly resembled his wife, a woman Jefferson adored), because "for most of his adult life," and, presumably, especially after his wife died (when Jefferson was thirty-nine), "he lacked the capacity for the direct and physical expression of his sexual energies." The man was a statue. "American Sphinx" won the National Book Award.

A year later, Eugene Foster, a retired University of Virginia pathologist, published in *Nature* the results of DNA tests he had undertaken, working with scientists in Oxford, Leicester, and Leiden. Foster tested the blood of the descendants of Field Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson's uncle; Eston Hemings, Sally's youngest son; and Thomas Woodson, who some believe was Sally's eldest child. (The Y chromosome passes down through males virtually unaltered, but Jefferson's only son by his wife died in infancy, which is why Foster had to find his Jeffersonian Y elsewhere.) The tests cast doubt on one relationship and proved another. Thomas Woodson's descendants don't have the Jefferson Y. Eston Hemings's do. This doesn't prove that Eston, let alone Sally Hemings's other children, were fathered by Thomas Jefferson. It proves only that Eston's father was a Jefferson. Alas, there just wasn't another Jefferson handy, there at Monticello, and with a Y in his pocket, each time Hemings conceived. Ellis, in later editions of his biography, graciously conceded the argument. "Prior to the DNA evidence," he wrote, "one might have reasonably concluded that Jefferson was living a paradox. Now it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that he was living a lie." Dissenters persist, citing the circumstantial nature of the evidence. But today most historians agree with the conclusion of a research committee convened by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, at Monticello: Jefferson "most likely was the father of all six of Sally Hemings's children."

Lost in the DNA-driven consensus, however, was Gordon-Reed's point. It ought never to have taken a lab test to bolster a claim deducible from the documentary record. For a conference at Monticello and the University of Virginia in 1999, Gordon-Reed revisited the case:

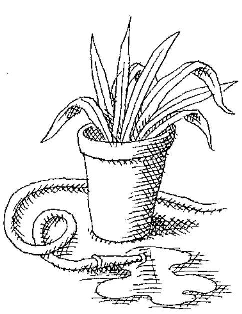
> It is true that we do not and will never have the details of what went on between Jefferson and Hemings and their children. This does not mean that we have nothing to go on. Perhaps the most persistent, and ultimately damaging, feature of the original debate over whether the relationship existed at all was the tight rein placed upon the historical imagination. One was simply not to let one's mind wander too freely over the matter. Brainstorming, drawing reasonable inferences from actions, attempting to piece together a plausible view of the matter were shunted into the category of illegitimate speculation, as grave an offense as outright lying.

Deductions and inferences can be wrong. But they're not illicit; they're how history, at its best, makes sense of a senseless world.

In Gordon-Reed's new book, "The Hemingses of Monticello," her single most revealing source is the memoir of Madison Hemings, printed by a newspaperman named S. F. Wetmore in an obscure Ohio paper called the *Pike County Republican* in 1873. (Wetmore likely first heard about Hemings from a census-taker in a neighboring county who, in the 1870 census, noted next to Madison Hemings's name, "This man is the son of Thomas Jefferson." Four months after Wetmore published Hemings's story, a Jefferson biographer named James Parton, writing in *The Atlantic Monthly*, summarily dismissed it: "Mr. Hemings has been misinformed."

Parton believed that Hemings was either a fraud or a fool. He did not seek him out; he did not consider what he said. He disregarded him. Gordon-Reed attributes such dismissals to a number of stereotypes: historians saw Hemings as an angry ex-slave with delusions of grandeur, a feebleminded, childlike pawn. Parton probably did see Hemings this way. But it is also true that Madison Hemings's credibility had already been damaged, long before James Parton came along, by every nineteenth-century writer, black and white, who made use of the Jefferson-Hemings legend. Callender poked a hole. Dickens left a dent. William Wells Brown dealt a blow. Abolitionists wanted, urgently, desperately, to end slavery. Their aim was to arouse sympathy. They told very many stories. Picturing white men preying on black women was their stock-in-trade. Stowe went further: she turned black men into feckless, sexless children. (That's one reason, but just one, that James Baldwin eviscerated "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in "Notes of a Native Son"; another was Stowe's failure to address "the only important question" about slavery: "What it was, after all, that moved her people to such deeds.") Purveying hackneyed stories at the expense of black men's humanity came at another cost: who would believe Madison Hemings? (It didn't help that Wetmore, in a shout-out to Stowe, titled the column in which he printed Hemings's memoir "Life Among the Lowly.") Answering slavery with sentimentality carried a price, too: who could imagine Jefferson's daughter doing anything but dying?

For decades, on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, the gavelling off of Thomas Jefferson's children was a story that was either too awful to be true or too useful to be proved false. Sally Hemings lived in Charlottesville until her death, in about 1835. Eston Hemings, a violinist who later in life went by the name "Eston Hemings Jefferson," died in Wisconsin in 1856. Madison Hemings, a carpenter, farmer, and father of nine, lived until 1877. An enterprising investigator might have looked any of them up, long before 1873, except . . . what if their stories weren't as poignant as what he wanted to print?



Charles Dickens didn't have much use for the supplicating author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." It galled him when her work was compared to his. But what he really found infuriating was when she pried into the private lives of public men. "Wish Mrs. Stowe was in the pillory," he cursed, when Stowe reported, in *The Atlantic*, on Byron's romance with his half sister. (Dickens, who conducted an adulterous affair for thirteen years, tried mightily to keep it secret.) For all his contempt for that "noble patriot . . . who dreamed of Freedom in a slave's embrace," he seems never to have smeared Jefferson by name. Parton apparently shared his gentlemanly reticence. To dismiss Madison Hemings, Parton marshalled no more than a mysterious allusion to a letter that he had in his possession, written by yet another biographer, Henry Randall, in 1868. In an interview, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, Jefferson's grandson, told Randall that Sally Hemings "had children which resembled Mr. Jefferson so closely that it was plain that they had his blood in their veins," but this, Randolph implied, was because they were the children of Peter Carr, Jefferson's nephew. (Randolph's sister, Ellen Coolidge, alleged that Jefferson's other nephew, Samuel Carr, was the father.) "The father of those children was a near relation of the Jeffersons," Parton wrote, "who need not be named."

Privacy is very much worth respecting, but not when one man's desire for it destroys another man's credibility. This isn't just about Jefferson and Hemings. It's about Parton's assumption that Randolph, a white man, must have been telling the truth while Hemings—listed on that census as "mulatto"—was, at best, "misinformed." Gordon-Reed, in her first book, began by establishing the authenticity of Madison Hemings's memoir. Then, instead of taking Parton's witnesses at their word, she cross-examined them. If Randolph didn't have something more scandalous still to hide, why admit that he was related to the Hemingses? Jefferson was away from Monticello about two-thirds of the time; the Carr brothers were nearly always close at hand. The births of Hemings's children always followed Jefferson's visits by nine months. "Why could not Peter Carr or Samuel Carr get Sally Hemings pregnant when Thomas Jefferson was not at Monticello, not once in fifteen years?" Gordon-Reed asked. (The DNA results vindicated her. Foster tested the Carr Y, too. It didn't match the Hemings blood.)

Gordon-Reed rested her case. Then she set about writing history. In "The Hemingses of Monticello," she uses

Madison Hemings's memoir as the foundation for an elaborate reconstruction of an American epic, a century-long saga of the Hemings family, in slavery and freedom. She reasons from analogy. She speculates. She asks her reader to trust her knowledge of human nature. There's no denying that a brick, here and there, could do with more mortar. Arguments from human nature can be persuasive, but when the wind blows they tend to totter. For one thing, "human nature" has a history; Enlightenment meditations on the subject, like David Hume's 1739-40 "A Treatise of Human Nature," surely influenced Jefferson's views on race. (Hume wondered if blacks were less than fully human—"There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual, eminent either in action or speculation"—because they could not make deductions.) For another, arguments from human nature are only as subtle and perceptive as the people who make them. Most of us are easily duped. "Error, Sir," Laurence Sterne wrote in "Tristram Shandy" (one of Jefferson's favorite books), "creeps in thro' the minute holes, and small crevices, which human nature leaves unguarded."

One measure of the boldness of Gordon-Reed's reading of the evidence is Kevin J. Hayes's "The Road to Monticello: The Life and Mind of Thomas Jefferson" (Oxford; $34.95), a wide-ranging and thoughtful biography of the sage of Monticello, by way of the books he bought and read. Hayes's study, like Gordon-Reed's, is the product of exhausting and illuminating research. But Hayes appears to have decided, early on, that Sally Hemings and her children had no role in, or influence on, the life and mind of Thomas Jefferson. In almost seven hundred pages, during which Hayes frequently comments on Jefferson's private life—his Paris flirtation with Maria Cosway, for instance—the essence of what he has to say about Sally Hemings has to do with Callender's 1802 report in the Richmond *Recorder:* "The story he published remains a part of the historical discourse and continues to fascinate the popular imagination."

This kind of thing is discouraging. I guess I always figured that a man who carries on a secret, decades-long affair is not unaffected by the experience, whether or not there's a memorial to him on the Washington Mall. It doesn't define him. It doesn't mean we should disinherit him. But it might have kept him up nights. If Gordon-Reed's challenge is met, Thomas Jefferson is a man in need of a new biography. But first it's the Hemingses' turn.

"The Hemingses of Monticello" tells a family story, across the generations. Harriet Hemings had seven white great-grandparents; she was, in the idiom of the time, an "octoroon." She was also, because of a precedent-defying seventeenth-century Virginia statute, Thomas Jefferson's property. In 1655, a woman with an African mother and an English father successfully sued for her freedom by relying on English precedent, in which children inherit status from their father. Not long after, the House of Burgesses, eager to avoid another legal challenge, turned English law upside down, answering doubts about "whether children got by an Englishman upon a Negro woman should be slave or free" by reaching back to an archaic Roman rule, *partus sequitur ventrem* (you are what your mother was).

Generations passed. There was much begetting. In about 1735, Gordon-Reed recounts, an Englishman named Captain Hemings had sex with an enslaved "full-blooded African" whose name has not survived. She gave birth to a daughter. Hemings tried to buy the child, but her owner refused to sell, curious to see how the girl would turn out. Hemings hoped to steal her; he failed. In 1746, the girl, Elizabeth Hemings, was transferred to the plantation of an Englishman named John Wayles, when he married Martha Epps. (Hemings, who was about eleven years old, was part of the marriage settlement.) Wayles married three times; his first wife bore him a daughter, Martha, in 1748. After the death of his third wife, Wayles did not marry again. But, as Gordon-Reed relates, he did start having sex with Elizabeth Hemings, by whom he had six children, including a daughter, Sally, born in 1773. In 1772, Martha Wayles married Thomas Jefferson. After John Wayles's death, the following year, Elizabeth Hemings and all of her children went to live at Monticello. In 1782, when Sally Hemings was still a child, Martha Jefferson died. Mrs. Jefferson, on her deathbed, extracted from her altogether bereft and nearly unmoored husband a promise that he would never remarry. In 1789, when sixteen-year-old Sally Hemings was living with forty-six-year-old Jefferson in Paris, she became pregnant. Madison Hemings said that the child "lived but a short time." Woodson's descendants claim that the boy grew up to be Thomas.

Gordon-Reed argues that Hemings made a deal with Jefferson. She knew that she could stay in Paris, where she would be free; slavery was illegal in France. She decided to return to Virginia because she missed her family. And Jefferson promised her that he would free all of her children when they reached the age of twenty-one. Maybe Hemings loved Jefferson; maybe he loved her, too. (In 1974, Fawn Brodie wrote a history supposing this to be the case, and more than one romance novel assumes the same.) Gordon-Reed knows that this question is important, since Jefferson and Hemings are more than people—they're symbols, too. But symbols get you only so far. "The romance is not saying that they may have loved one another," Gordon-Reed writes. "The romance is in thinking that it makes any difference if they did."

Jefferson, the architect of our freedom, could not reckon slavery's toll. "The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other," he wrote in the early seventeen-eighties. "The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances." Neither could Jefferson imagine his life, or the Union, freed of slavery, without bloodshed. "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever."

Moral impotence is a muffled, crippled agony. American sphinx? American Achilles.

Sally Hemings bore her last child in 1808, when she was about thirty-five. In 1815, the aging former President (who never admitted, publicly, anyway, that he was the father of Hemings's children) wrote a letter in which he wrestled with a matter—a "mathematical problem"—that had long vexed him. Just how many "crossings" had to happen before a child with a full-blooded African ancestor could be called "white"?

> Let us express the pure blood of the white in the capital letters of the printed alphabet . . . and any given mixture of either, by way of abridgment in MS. letters.
>
> Let the first crossing be of a, a pure negro, with A, a pure white. The unit of blood of the issue being composed of the half of that of each parent, will be $a/2 + A/2$. Call it, for abbreviation, h (half blood).

The letter goes on for a while. Suffice it to say: b is the second crossing, q is a "quarteroon," c is the third crossing.

> Let the third crossing be of q and C, their offspring will be $q/2 + C/2 = a/8 + A/8 + B/4 + C/2$, call this e (eighth), who having less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of a, or of pure negro blood, to wit $\frac{1}{8}$ only, is no longer a mulatto, so that a third cross clears the blood.

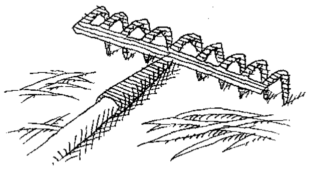
To Thomas Jefferson, Harriet Hemings and her brothers were e. What more they meant to him probably does depend as much on your view of human nature as on the documentary record. After Harriet Hemings took a stagecoach to Philadelphia in 1822, she travelled on to the nation's capital, where her brother Beverly lived as a white man. "She thought it to her interest, on going to Washington, to assume the role of a white woman," said Madison Hemings, the only one of Sally Hemings's children to remain part of the African-American community. *She thought it to her interest.* He seems never to have forgiven her. "I am not aware that her identity as Harriet Hemings of Monticello has ever been discovered," Madison said. Finding her now would be difficult. "Harriet married a white man in good standing in Washington City, whose name I could give but will not."

Truth isn't always stranger than nineteenth-century fiction, but usually it's less melodramatic. Thomas Jefferson's daughter, if she was his daughter, didn't leap to a watery grave. As late as the eighteen-sixties, years after "Clotel" was published, she was still alive, pursuing whatever liberty, and happiness, she could find, within plain sight of the White House, after all. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Exit Music, *by Ian Rankin (Little, Brown; $24.99).* The seventeenth and final novel in Rankin's Inspector Rebus series is set during the Edinburgh detective's final week at work. (He is nearing the mandatory retirement age of sixty.) The novel begins with a dissident Russian poet beaten to death, and expands to take in small-time drug dealers, cloak-wearing women who act in walking mystery tours of the city, international oligarchs, and Scottish bank executives. A contemporary artist who makes sound installations may be in league with politicians agitating for Scotland's independence. Rebus is as gruffly mischievous as ever, and the novel ends in a cliffhanger scene with his arch-enemy that will have readers gasping into the blank space that follows. Rankin's work is crime fiction at its most consuming, cerebral best.

Something to Tell You, *by Hanif Kureishi (Scribner; $26).* Kureishi's latest novel returns to the subject of immigrant life in London—a theme that brought him early success, with the screenplay for "My Beautiful Laundrette" and the novel "The Buddha of Suburbia"—but adds to it the jaundiced outlook of middle age. Jamal, an outwardly respectable psychoanalyst, harbors dark secrets, which generate the novel's thrillerlike plot, and darker desires. Kureishi fulsomely depicts the sexual frustrations and adventures of a middle-aged man: "the underbelly—or potbelly, more like—of British suburban sexuality," as one of Jamal's many disaffected ex-girlfriends puts it. And therapy, an experience that a patient compares to "being stirred inside by a huge spoon," provides Kureishi with fertile ground for caricature. At heart, however, this is a novel about guilt and retribution, as Jamal comes to terms with his past and realizes the terrible truth that "to conceal is to reveal."



The Other Half, *by Tom Buk-Swienty, translated from the Danish by Annette Buk-Swienty (Norton; $27.95).* Jacob Riis, an ambitious carpenter from a rural town in Denmark who became famous for his photojournalistic exposé of the squalor of Manhattan's tenements, abandoned his homeland after being spurned by a local beauty, and spent several years as a tramp and itinerant worker in Buffalo and western Pennsylvania. This biography vividly captures that time, during which Riis was constantly on the verge of exhaustion and destitution. His experience of poverty shaped his later attempts to humanize it, in the stark images and text of his seminal book "How the Other Half Lives." Buk-Swienty esteems his subject without idolizing him, noting that Riis sought to improve the living conditions of the poor in part to stave off anarchy and a Communist revolution.

Vanity Fair: The Portraits, *by Graydon Carter and the editors of Vanity Fair, (Abrams; $65).* Because *Vanity Fair* ran from 1913 to 1936, ceased publication, and then resumed in 1983, this dazzling panoply of twentieth-century fame has some striking absences: no Elvis, no Marilyn, no Beatles. The two resulting eras are presented not chronologically but mostly as a series of then-and-now diptychs: Clark Gable opposite Leonardo DiCaprio, Fred and Adele Astaire opposite the Olsen twins, H. G. Wells opposite Tom Wolfe. (It's presumably happenstance that Richard Perle is opposite Goebbels.) Comparing the two eras is instructive. Earlier pictures, many still echoing the conventions of society portraiture, can seem innocent alongside the baroque intricacies of more recent shoots. If Edward Steichen's Isadora Duncan against the Parthenon is the epochal image of the first run, Annie Leibovitz's multi-person tableaux, as static and riddling as allegorical paintings, typify the current style. Occasionally, a subject (Salvador Dali) or a photographer (Horst P. Horst) had the longevity to figure in both periods.

THE ART WORLD

TABLES FOR ONE

Giorgio Morandi's still-lifes.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

In my ideal world, the home of everyone who loves art would come equipped with a painting by Giorgio Morandi, as a gymnasium for daily exercise of the eye, mind, and soul. I want the ad account: "Stay fit the Morandi way!" Take your dream pick from among the hundred and ten works in the potent retrospective of the Italian modern master now at the Metropolitan Museum. You can hardly go wrong with anything dated after 1920 or so, once Morandi, who died in 1964, at the age of seventy-three, had worked through his early involvements with Cézanne, Cubism, Futurism, and the *pittura metafisica* of Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrà. But make your choice a still-life. Morandi painted some striking landscapes and the odd, tentative self-portrait, but the arenas of his greatness were the tabletops in his small studio. He passed nearly his entire life in an apartment in Bologna with his mother, until her death, in 1950, and three younger sisters, who, like him, never married. (His businessman father died in 1909, four years before Morandi's graduation from Bologna's art academy.) Morandi's stagings of his repertory company of nondescript bottles, vases, pitchers, and whatnot are definitive twentieth-century art works. They breathe intimacy with the past—Piero della Francesca, Chardin—and address a future that still glimmers, just out of reach. They remain unbeatably radical meditations on what can and can't happen when three dimensions are transposed into two. Morandi will always rivet painters and educate all who care for painting.

He seems to have cared for nothing else. If he ever had a sexual interest, it is unrecorded. He first set foot outside Italy in 1956, and then only in Switzerland. His most frequent forays were to Florence, to consult Piero, Masaccio, Giotto, and Uccello. A man "unwilling even to squash an insect in his garden," according to a fine biography by Janet Abramowicz, "Giorgio Morandi: The Art of Silence," he suffered a breakdown when he was drafted into the Italian Army, in 1915, after which he was excused from service. He supported himself by teaching painting and etching. (His etchings amaze, triggering subliminal sensations of color with nothing but variations in crosshatched black lines.) He had friends, and he liked to laugh, with the ironical and at times scathing humor of a sensitive man. The academic establishment in Bologna, a university town, disparaged him until late in his career. He participated in the right-wing, ruralist Strapaese movement of the late nineteen-twenties. His attitude toward Mussolini, whose regime gave him teaching jobs, was more positive than not, although he was briefly imprisoned in 1943 for associating with anti-Fascists. (If ever an artist merited political amnesty, on the ground of unworldliness, it would be Morandi.) Fame came to him after the war: he won first prize for an Italian painter at the 1948 Venice Biennale, and became so revered in Italy that filmmakers, notably Federico Fellini, in "La Dolce Vita," used his work as a ready symbol of lofty sensibility. Morandi had a last adventurous phase of nearly abstract drawings and watercolors that condense into swift marks a lifetime of looking.

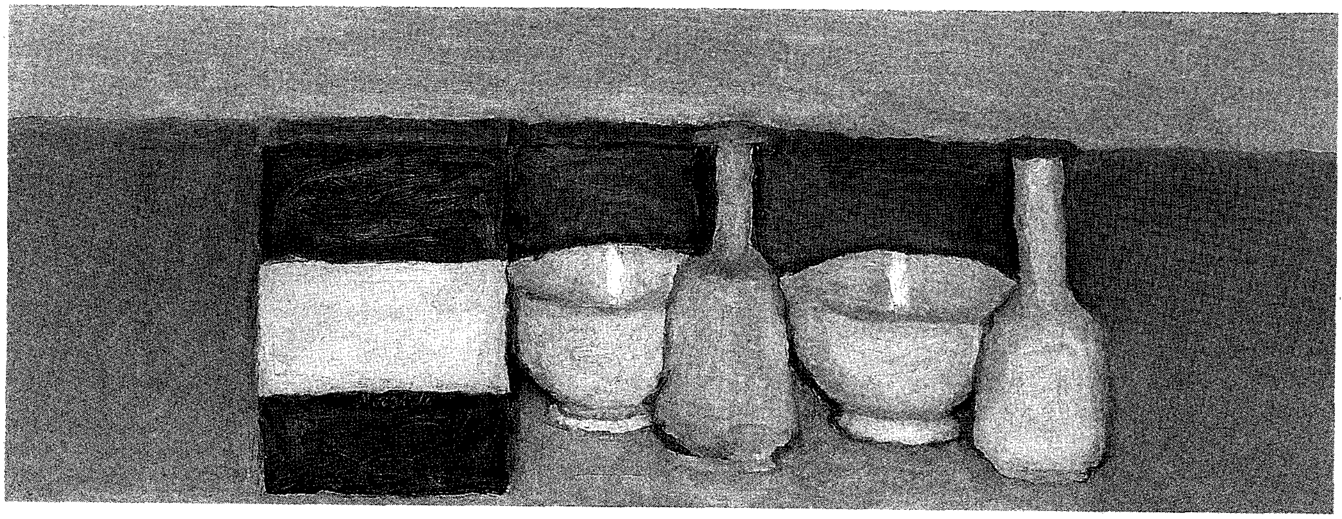
The still-lifes vary from bright to crepuscular in tone, from crisply limned to almost illegibly blurred, and, in texture, from creamy to arid. To describe any one of them as exemplary is to provoke tacit protests from the rest. So, in general: The paintings present objects singly, side by side, or in overlapping groups. They feel monumental because they are viewed at eye level, or from just above. (Morandi, who stood six feet four, built a high table that he often used for that purpose.) He disregarded the receding plane of the tabletop, often shrouding the back edge with brown paper, so that it wouldn't distract him. The horizon of that edge commonly seems arbitrary, and the tabletop itself may be woozily indefinite. Morandi anchors his objects frontally, pressed against our gaze. He often paints them all but flat, adding only dim highlights and perfunctory shadings, which at first excite and then gently relax our automatic effort to read roundedness and depth in the pictures. It can take time—minutes, not seconds—to get over what we think we are seeing and to behold what's there. But a sensitive eye may catch on right away. The most helpful piece of writing on Morandi that I know is the painter Vija Celmins's description of her first encounter with one of his still-

Morandi in his studio, at his family home, in Bologna.

ABOVE: © LEO LIONNI; OPPOSITE: © GIORGIO MORANDI/SIAE, 2008/MART

lifes (in 1961, when she was twenty-one), which "projected an extraordinary set of grays far into the gallery and into my eyes. On closer inspection, I discovered how strange the painting was, how the objects seemed to be fighting for each other's space. One could not determine their size or location. They appeared both flat and dimensional, and were so tenderly painted that the paint itself seemed to be the subject."

The ambiguity of "size or location" is key to Morandi's indelible modernity. It's as if he had set out, time and again, to nail down the whatness of his objects but couldn't get beyond the preliminary matter of their whereness. (He didn't much value the things in themselves. Photographs show that some were slathered or, in the case of clear glass bottles, filled with pigments—they were dedicated to painting the way animals are raised for food.) Morandi was free of the organizing prejudice of perspective. Go look at a Cézanne after seeing this show. It will seem old-fashioned. Conventional pictorial space remained a safety net for the great Frenchman, whose influence Morandi subsumed. Even Picasso didn't as fully abandon perspective—smashing it to localized bits in his Cubism, letting it creep in where it was convenient thereafter. Morandi fumbled, thrillingly, amid the ruins of mental concepts of space. He reversed the thrust of his beloved early-Renaissance inventors of perspective. In an Uccello, say, we register both a mathematical formula of spatial recession and the fact that it is clumsily artificial. Even the majestic Piero fell short of dissolving the preëminent appeal of the painted surface into the fiction of a window view. (Leonardo would do that.) Morandi's eye and mind lived in the surface, marooned there by honest, anxious skepticism. Dramatic uncertainty intensified in his work as he aged. In one of the show's last paintings (the one I want to take home), a jug, whose ochre hue interpenetrates with that of the wall behind it, abuts a tall box in livid, very pale blue; a corrugated ball, half ochre and half greenish blue, rests on the gray table in what would be the foreground—were not the picture, in its effect, all foreground. Dark, jittery outlines startlingly anticipate a look of late work by Philip Guston. That's not unusual in Morandi, whose explorations fortuitously scout the distinctive qualities of subsequent artists. The step from some of his landscapes—with forms at once filmy in color and corporeal in substance—to certain works by the brilliant Luc Tuymans is almost no step at all.


"Natura Morta" (1954). Italians so revered Morandi that Fellini used him as a symbol of lofty sensibility in "La Dolce Vita."

Painting for Morandi was manual labor, first and last. For a time, he ground his own pigments. He stretched his own canvases, constantly varying their proportions. (In the Met show, there are almost as many different sizes of picture as there are pictures.) No one work builds on another. Infinitely refined, Morandi never succumbs to elegance. Even his effulgently pinkish floral still-lifes abjure virtuosity, though they beguile. (One might be made of ice cream; another stiffens to marzipan.) That's because the exigencies of rendering—tiny slippages between eye and hand—constituted, for him, a permanent emergency, requiring incessant adjustment. (Rose petals may jam up like large people competing to pass through a small door.) He did not have a style. He had a signature: "Morandi," written large, often, to broadcast that a picture had done all it could. He is a painter's painter, because to look at his work is to re-create it, feeling in your wrist and fingers the sequence of strokes, each a stab of decision which discovers a new problem.

Color works hard in Morandi. His hues tend toward muddy pastels, always warm. He employs an unabridged dictionary of browns. Even his blues and greens usually secrete invisibly admixed red or yellow, insuring the projection of "an extraordinary set of grays far into the gallery" which Celmins noted. The colors are muted like voices lowered so as not to disturb a sleeper; but their melody and tone penetrate. A Morandi grabs your eye at any distance. Moreover, it's the same picture at any distance, as resolved and unresolved near at hand as far away. (His comprehension of art history skips the Baroque and every other type of synthesized illusion.) Morandi has never been a popular artist and never will be. He engages the world one solitary viewer at a time. The experience of his work is unsharable even, in a way, with oneself, like a word remembered but not remembered, on the tip of the tongue. ♦

THE THEATRE

AMERICAN GOTHIC

Thomas Bradshaw on the absurdities of race.

BY HILTON ALS

When Robert Wilson chose the brilliant black performer Sheryl Sutton for his 1970 show "Deafman Glance," he was doing more than following his penchant for strong casting: he was purposefully incorporating blackness into America's primarily white avant-garde theatre. Wilson—Southern born and white—was also subverting the stereotype of the black woman as a domestic Mammy: dressed in a nineteenth-century-style floor-length black dress and sporting an Afro, Sutton's character murdered her own children. After "Deafman Glance," Sutton continued to be a fringe pioneer. She was involved with the now defunct New York-based Squat Theatre, home to many Eastern European dissident artists. And she worked with Wilson again on "Einstein on the Beach," his seminal 1976 piece, written with Philip Glass. In "Einstein," Sutton had a number of haunting scenes, but perhaps none more powerful than her speech in the second scene of Act I, in which she intoned "Mr. Bojangles," among other things, over Glass's slithery score. Sutton managed to cut through the sentimentality of the indirect tribute to the black dancer Bill (Bojangles) Robinson by making the name simultaneously grandiose and ridiculous.

Since Sutton's début, no other black actor, writer, or director has had the same impact on our theatrical avant-garde. Aside from the early work of the playwright Adrienne Kennedy—particularly her 1965 piece, "A Beast's Story," and 1969's "Sun"—black theatre in this country has remained, for the most part, mired in folklore and its various offshoots: minstrel shows that pass as naturalistic family dramas; "get whitey" spectacles; nostalgia-tinged song-and-dance revues. This trend is disrupted only when artists like Wilson and the late Iranian playwright and director Reza Abdoh—whose 1993 play "Tight Right White" is one of the most insightful and entertaining treatises on race that we're likely to see—amass enough power to hire black actors, and to force the audience to see things as they do. (When companies like the Wooster Group want to inject race into a show, more often than not their white actors don blackface and coon it up as a "critique" of the performance of blackness.)

Slowly, almost single-handedly, however, a twenty-eight-year-old black playwright named Thomas Bradshaw has been taking on the idea of race in the theatre. At the same time, he has sliced open the pretensions of the white avant-garde with a wittily glistening axe. In his new play, "Southern Promises" (at Performance Space 122), one can catch a glimpse of Bradshaw's anarchic gifts, but the production is also interesting for another reason: it shows us how directorial political correctness can damage the work of an independent-minded writer.

"Southern Promises" is based on the narrative of a freed slave—a genre that enjoyed something of a vogue in the decades before the Civil War. In 1849, a thirty-four-year-old Virginia slave named Henry (Box) Brown came up with the idea of mailing himself to freedom. After getting a free black man, a white storekeeper, and an abolitionist to help him, Brown climbed into a baize-lined container and was mailed off to Pennsylvania—express. Twenty-seven hours later, he was received by that city's Anti-Slavery Committee. (In 1850, after the passage of the second Fugitive Slave Act, he fled to England, where he pursued a career as a showman.) The story of his escape has exercised a particular fascination for black artists, among them Charles Burnett, who made a movie, "The Final Insult" (1997), about a modern-day Brown-like character who ends up living in a shopping cart in Los Angeles.

Bradshaw, however, rejects Burnett's pat ironies—and his lyricism. Divided into twenty-two short scenes, "Southern Promises" presents Benjamin (Erwin E. A. Thomas), a slave who lives on a Southern plantation with his wife, Charlotte (Sadrina Johnson). There, they service—in more ways than one, but never together—the mistress of the house, Elizabeth (Lia Aprile), and, eventually, her brother-in-law, David (Jeff Biehl), who takes over as master of the estate once his brother, Isaiah (Peter McCabe), dies. Bradshaw has little interest in Benjamin's escape to freedom, which takes up a mere five scenes, at the end of the play. What he wants to address here is the interaction between blacks and whites, and the commonplace language of power and subjugation.

Isaiah's dying wish was that his slaves be set free, but David and Elizabeth refuse to fulfill it. In one scene, David calls Charlotte, who is caring for Elizabeth's young son, into his study and asks her if she'd like to be free.

CHARLOTTE: Well, master. That's a tough question. You know that I love it here. . . . And you take such good care of us. I honestly can't imagine a situation where I would be happier.

But yes, part of me does wonder what it would be like to be free.

DAVID: I'd like to make you an offer. I'm willing to let you and Benjamin buy your freedom in exchange for some kindness and caring on your part. . . .

He grabs her and kisses her deeply.

CHARLOTTE: Are you sure the mistress would agree to let us buy our freedom?

DAVID: Don't worry about the mistress. I'm the master of this house.

The baby starts crying. They kiss again. He bends her over his desk, pulls up her skirt and has sex with her very quickly. He should finish after about ten pumps. He pulls out, buttons up, and regains his composure.

The baby's crying. Go tend to your duties.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, master.

Bradshaw portrays all of this matter-of-factly: he takes it for granted that we can furnish the drama—that we can project onto his characters what we've learned from "Roots" or the master-slave scenes in cheesy historical dramas. In this way, he makes us ask, Have the books and films about slavery cheapened the subject? For Bradshaw, slavery has been reduced, in the public imagination, to sex—miscegenation. That, and loads of moanin' low about Jesus, the white savior of the black oppressed. ("Jesus is a trick on niggers," the protagonist of Flannery O'Connor's 1949 novel "Wise Blood" says.)

After Elizabeth gets Charlotte sold off the plantation—the cunning mistress never loses her passion for Benjamin; in fact, she gives birth to his child—she goes to visit Benjamin in his cabin with David and her brother John (Hugh Sinclair), who is a preacher. Bradshaw writes:

> *At rise Benjamin is lying despondently in bed. . . . John brings in a turkey leg and cornbread on a plate. John is eating cornbread.*
>
> DAVID: We've let you lie here for two days because of your grief, but now it's time to move on, Benjamin.
>
> ELIZABETH: We know how much you loved Charlotte, but we think that you should take a new wife to console yourself. Are there any of our slave girls that you would like to marry? . . .
>
> BENJAMIN: I don't want a new wife. I love Charlotte.
>
> JOHN: God works in mysterious ways, Benjamin. You must toss off your grief and take a new wife.
>
> ELIZABETH: We've brought you a turkey leg and some cornbread to make you feel better.
>
> BENJAMIN: You brung me a turkey leg?

We're in "Saturday Night Live" territory here—particularly the skit in which Robert De Niro plays Thomas Jefferson asking Sally Hemings (Maya Rudolph) for a date. Coming on to her, he asks what time she gets off work, and she says, looking a little incredulous, "Um. . . . Never."

Unfortunately, Jose Zayas, who directed "Southern Promises," messes up this absurdist work by trying to shoehorn it into a realistic mode. It's as though he felt he had to justify or explain away Bradshaw's outrageousness. As a result of his straitlaced approach, the actors—who all seem game—aren't liberated; they're stuck somewhere between realism and parody, trying to present genuine feelings in a Charles Ludlam-like setting. Bradshaw's language is not psychological: it's purposefully, and essentially, ridiculous. His plays—a selection of which, happily for us, has been published by Samuel French—deserve a director like the late Douglas Sirk, who said, in reference to "Imitation of Life," his stylized 1959 film about race, "You can't escape what you are. . . . Both white and black are leading imitated lives. . . . Everything, even in life, is inevitably removed from you. You can't reach or touch the real. You just see reflections."

Thomas and Johnson in "Southern Promises." Photograph by Elinor Carucci.

At P.S. 122, our attention drifts. The play should move quickly, barely giving us time to absorb one aspect of its comedic horror before we're called upon to watch another. Instead, the action drags as Zayas gives the actors subtext. If Bradshaw found the right collaborator, his actors might achieve the degree of freedom that Robert Downey, Jr., attains—playing an Australian actor who thinks it would be cool to be black—in the movie "Tropic Thunder," surely one of the best portrayals of male and racial hysteria ever. Then Bradshaw would be able to say, of the source of his rich and groundbreaking work, what Downey said when a TV interviewer asked him what had inspired *his* performance. Downey paused for a moment, then replied, his eyes twinkling with mischief, "My sorry-ass self." ♦

THAT'S TOO BAD DEPARTMENT

From the Times.

Those who are not imprisoned are often arrested for possession of small quantities of drugs and later released—in some cases with a permanent stain on their records that can make it difficult to get a job or start a young person on a path to future arrests.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

NO MAN'S LAND

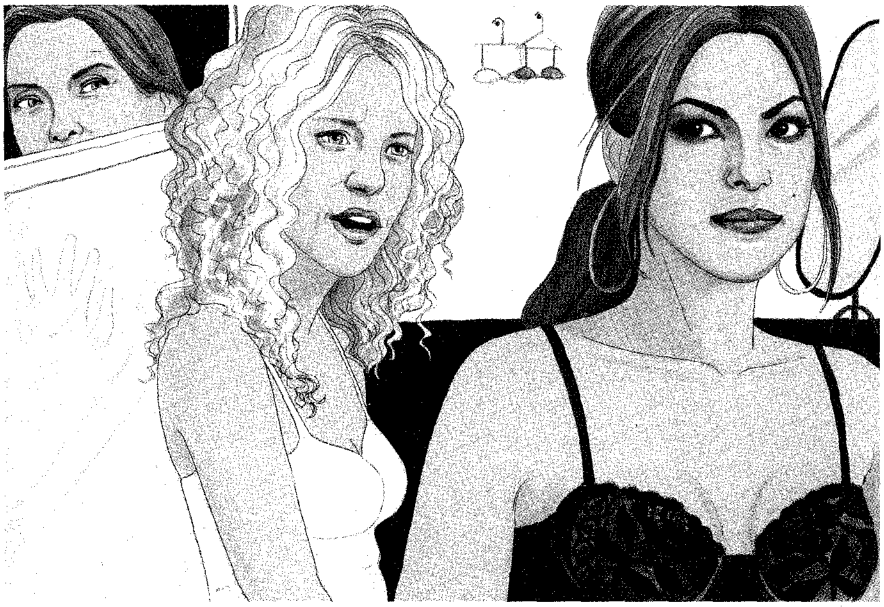
"The Women" and "Lakeview Terrace."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The funniest thing about "The Women" is that Mick Jagger is one of the producers. There was a knowing laugh in the theatre as his name sprang up in the opening credits—our last chance to laugh, as it turned out, for the next two hours. The movie, written and directed by Diane English, is a rehash (or, more simply, a hash) of the George Cukor picture of 1939, which was written by Anita Loos and Jane Murfin, who adapted it from Clare Boothe Luce's play. The old film was famous for featuring no men whatsoever, and the latest version maintains the trick. Everybody is female: fellow-diners, New York passersby, and merciless hailers of cabs. Only in the closing scene is a person of the opposite sex allowed to emerge, and it's not Mick Jagger. He was probably lolling backstage, away from the action, licking his lips.

Meg Ryan plays Mary Haines, wife of the invisible Stephen Haines and mother of preteen Molly (India Ennenga). Mary's best friends are Sylvie Fowler (Annette Bening), a magazine editor who fears for her job, and Edie Cohen (Debra Messing), who has three little girls and another child on the way. You can already hear the squeaks and grinds as the various figures are shunted into position; this is one of those movies in which human beings, instead of being drawn as living souls, are defined purely by the social or professional attitudes they happen to represent. Most grimly walled in is Alex Fisher (Jada Pinkett Smith), who stands for blocked best-selling African-American lesbian essayists everywhere.

Via the loose mouth of a manicurist, Sylvie—followed by Mary herself—learns that Stephen is having an affair with a perfume saleswoman named Crystal Allen (Eva Mendes). In 1939, Crystal was played by Joan Crawford, whom another character described as a "pretty girl," which is like referring to the M4 Sherman as a nice little runabout. Not only would you write your last will and testament before going to bed with her; one look at those burning eyes and you'd think twice before asking her for an atomizer. Mendes makes a more credible vamp, and Crystal gets one short speech, during a contretemps with Mary, that puts the whole film into perspective. The two of them meet while trying on lingerie—Crystal to keep her man on the boil, Mary to coax him back. (In any film about solidarity, lingerie is the shorthand for emergency sluthood.) "You have your fancy gardens and your nice houses," Crystal says, and proceeds to chip away at Mary's fantasy of marital bliss. Mary, who says that she was hoping for a "transcendental moment of connect," whatever that might be, is floored by the insult, but Crystal's right. The women in "The Women" can afford to treasure their feelings and fuss over their heartbreaks. They're rich.



Annette Bening, Meg Ryan, and Eva Mendes in a remake of George Cukor's movie.

Strange to say, Cukor's version is scarcely more seductive. Unlike his other dramas of fine living, such as "Dinner at Eight" (1933) or "The Philadelphia Story" (1940), it leaves you in a bad mood, resentful of its characters. Depression audiences, lofted from their cares by the *son et lumière* of Katharine Hepburn flaring up at Cary Grant, may well have felt their noses being rubbed in it by the twitterings of Rosalind Russell and Norma Shearer in "The Women," and so it is with their modern counterparts. "What do you think this is, some kind of nineteen-thirties movie?" Mary asks her mother, Catherine (Candice Bergen), and the answer is: No, this is some kind of nineteen-eighties movie. The women have no menfolk on show, but they have nannies, housekeepers, gleaming automobiles, and spreading lawns on which they host luncheon parties for their pals, half of whom treat them like enemies. Their interests are pared to a safe minimum: fashion, magazines, and fashion magazines. Nobody sweats for a living, or hungers for one. When Mary separates from Stephen, and hits a low, she revives herself by taking photographs (cue a closeup of a seven-thousand-dollar Leica) and coloring in sketches of dresses. "I want to design my own collection," she admits to her mother, who offers to finance it with her own inheritance, as yet unused and unrequired. Isn't life grand?

Only one thing in "The Women" escapes the spit of cattiness, and that is not a human being but a store. According to Sylvie, "Nobody. Hates. Saks." Such is the moral of this film, run a close second by "Don't give a shit about anybody—be

LARA TOMLIN

selfish," as delivered by Leah (Bette Midler), a trumpet-voiced movie agent. In short, we are back in the land of "Sex and the City," and thus with the lurking suggestion that greed—emotional greed, not just the material ravenings of the shopper—is the only alternative to the humiliation that comes from subservience to men. No middle way is permitted. Compare this with the split-and-try-again comedies of Hollywood's heyday, like "The Awful Truth" or "The Lady Eve," and you can't help recalling the satisfaction of watching the heroine come out on top, not because she had mooched around reflecting on her self-worth, or invested that self in handbags, but because she had fought like blazes to get there. Real women like Barbara Stanwyck, Irene Dunne, and Katharine Hepburn scrapped for their power, against a society that had no wish to give it up, or against hapless, dithery males who had no clue what to do with it, whereas "The Women" of 2008 gives empowerment a bad name.

As in "Sex and the City," Candice Bergen is the only person here who cracks wise to any effect; everybody else flounders in a mire of soggy lines. A sample: "What do you think she sells, Chanel Number Shit?"; "Your Pradas are ruining my perennials!"; "This place makes Betty Ford look like Disneyland." Laugh? I nearly slept. The wordplay is matched by the fatigue that pervades both the musical and the visual vocabularies: in the opening credits, an over-the-river travelling shot of the Manhattan skyline gives way to a closeup of heels and toned calves, hymned by a voice singing "I'm feeling beautiful." At the other end of the story, I just about clung on, consoled by the thought that, whatever else, Diane English had at least found the decency not to stoop to a birthing scene. Then it was time for the birthing scene. I am aware of the dire paucity of films that appeal to a grownup female audience, as opposed to a mob of ten-year-old "Transformers" fans, but why should discerning viewers of either gender be fobbed off with indolence? Taken together, "Sex and the City," "Mamma Mia!," and "The Women" add up to a spectacular trilogy of the inane, and to point that out is not the prerogative of the misogynist or the killjoy. It's the view of someone who thinks that women deserve better from the movies, and who sees no joys to kill.

It comes as a shock to realize that, in three months' time, Samuel L. Jackson will turn sixty. We can't think of him growing old, just as we can't really imagine that he was ever young. He seemed to arrive on our screens full grown: ripe in mind and muscle, richly amused, and already in possession of his gifts. I love those line readings of his, best heard in "Pulp Fiction"—the diction clear and clipped, but the tone swinging up into inquiry at the end of a phrase, as if other people's assumptions were there to be probed.

Those jabs come to the fore in Neil LaBute's new movie, "Lakeview Terrace." Jackson plays a seasoned Los Angeles cop with the workmanlike name of Abel Turner—a widower who runs a tight ship, to the chagrin of his young son, Marcus (Jaishon Fisher), and his teenage daughter, Celia (a terrific performance from Regine Nehy). One day, new neighbors arrive: a white guy named Chris Mattson (Patrick Wilson) and his wife, Lisa (Kerry Washington), who happens to be black. From the word go, Abel doesn't like them, for some reason, and one of the strengths of LaBute's film is that, for a long while, we can't work out what that reason might be. It is mainly, but not wholly, an aversion to mixed-race marriage; Abel is offended by something else in Chris and Lisa—their liberality and hope, or their ignorance of the fractious patch of South Central that he patrols. Generations matter, too, and this is where Jackson's age counts: in uniform, he looks beefy and buff, but out in his yard, slopping about in shorts and sandals, he seems to sag.

The movie was written by David Loughery and Howard Korder, not by LaBute himself, though it sounds a lot like him, in the lethal simmer of its conversation. (Brace yourself for Abel at the Mattsons' housewarming party.) So much is at stake here: Chris and Lisa's house overlooks a vale of undeveloped land, on the uneasy frontier of town and country, and there is a wider sense of an urban culture uncertain where to head next. It's a shame, then, that the later stages of "Lakeview Terrace" should overheat and spill into silliness. The plot is compromised, not resolved, by the pulling of a gun. It was enough that Abel carried one with him at all times. Likewise, the barroom scene where he "explains" the source of his wrath tends to drain it of threat, and, as for the forest fires that rage toward the characters' quiet road, thanks a lot, but I *think* we get the point about racial inflammation. The first hour of the film, however, with Jackson in command, feels dangerous, necessary, and rife with comic disturbance. Just like the man himself. ♦

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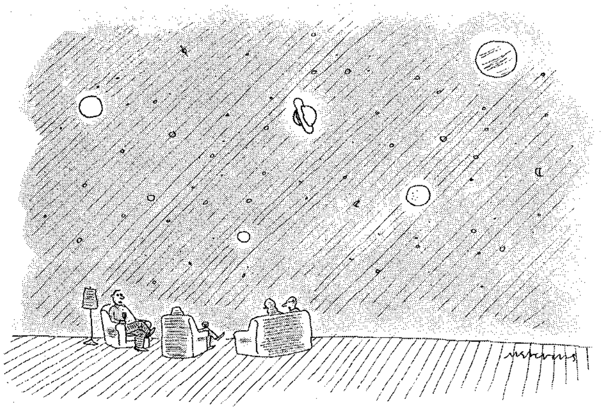
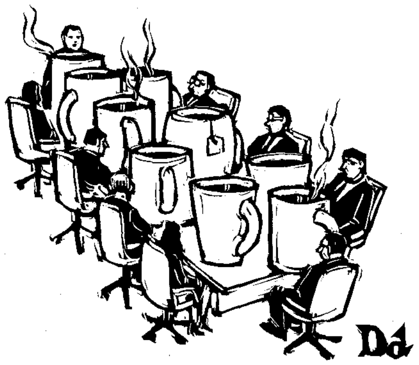
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Michael Crawford, must be received by Sunday, September 21st. Finalists in the September 8th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 6th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Five hundred billion galaxies and nothing's on."
Tom Elia, New York City



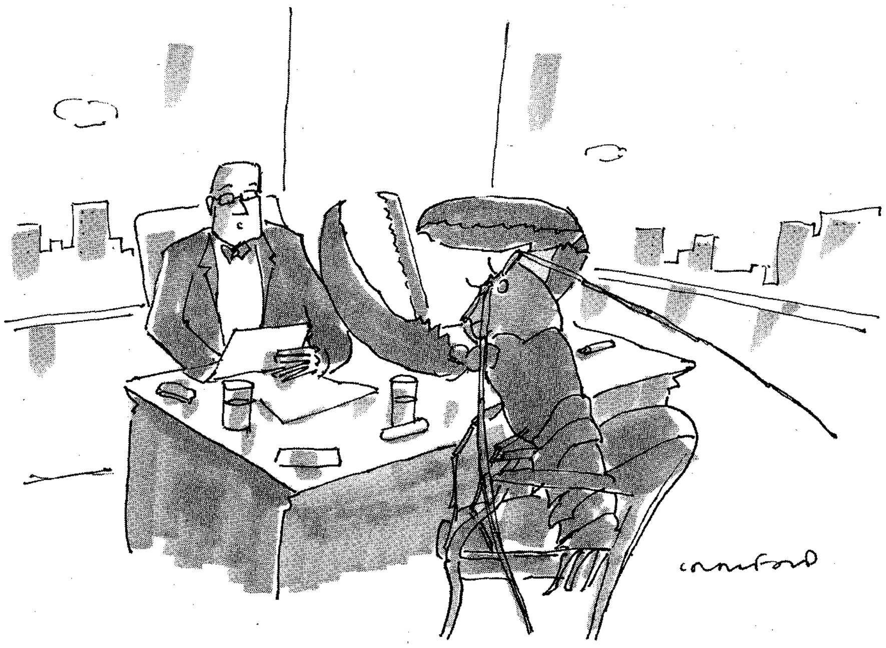
THE FINALISTS

"Can you please pass the cow?"
Bennett Ellenbogen, Brooklyn, N.Y.

"Let me start by welcoming you all to Narcoleptics Anonymous."
Mike Worth, West Chester, Pa.

"By a 9–0 vote, the rest-room expansion project is approved."
Jon Thompson, Sedona, Ariz.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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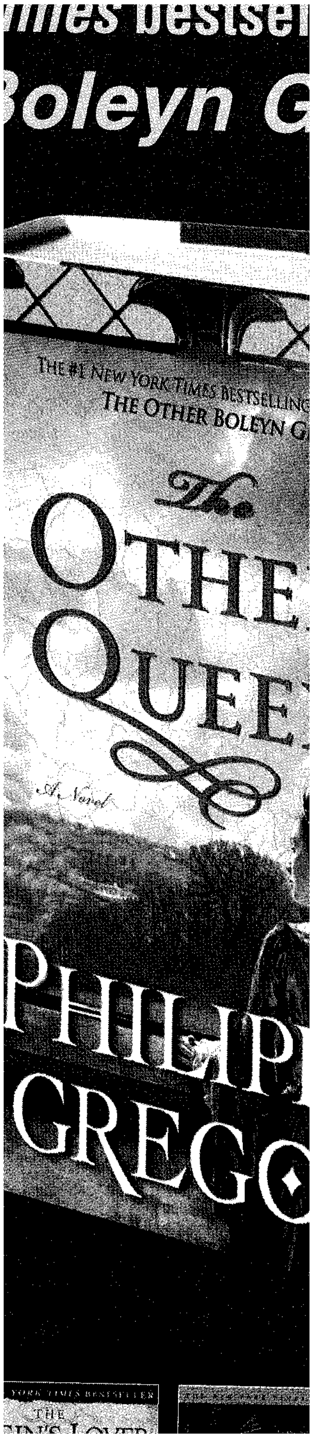
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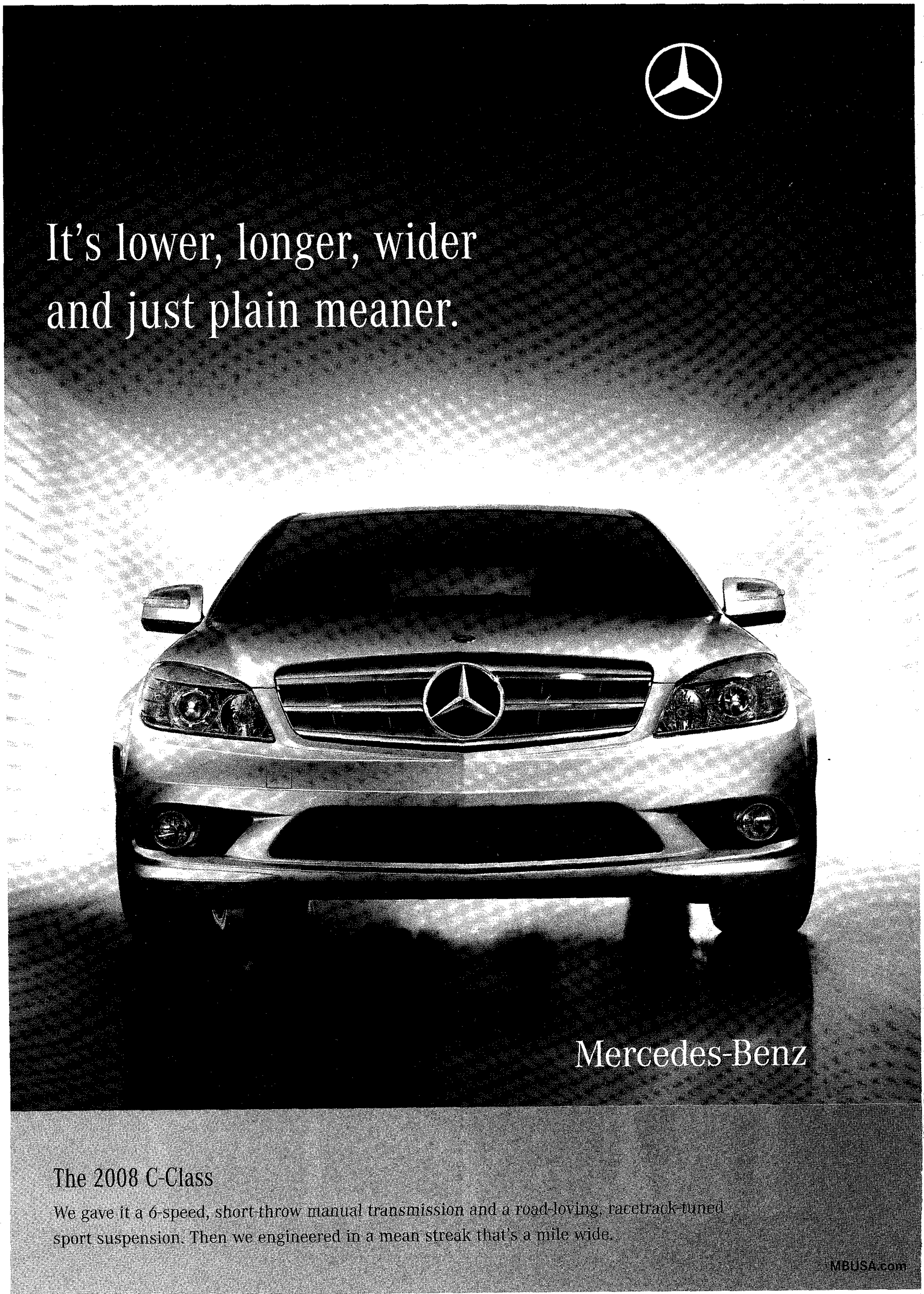
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